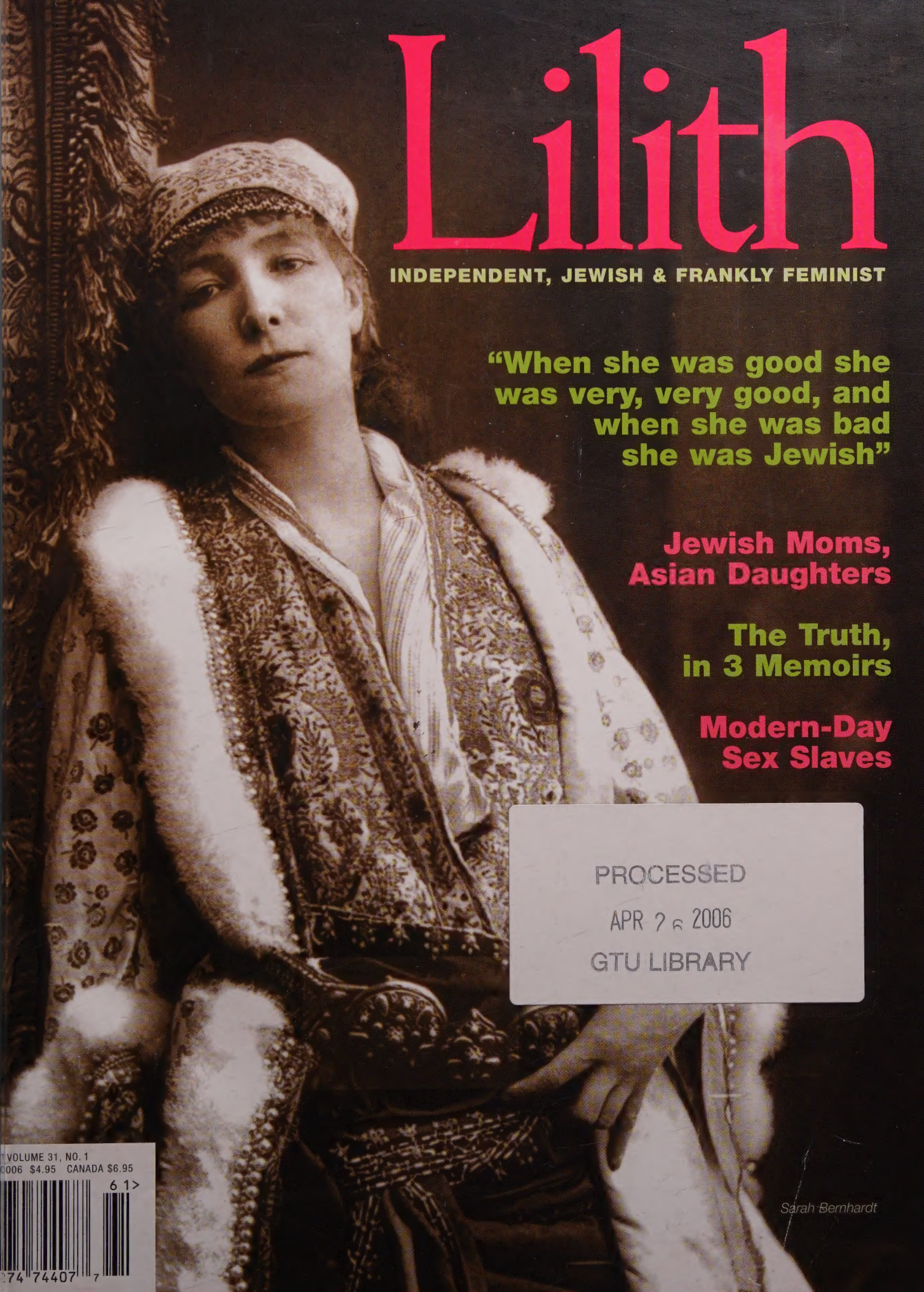




Lilith

INDEPENDENT, JEWISH & FRANKLY FEMINIST

**"When she was good she
was very, very good, and
when she was bad
she was Jewish"**

**Jewish Moms,
Asian Daughters**

**The Truth,
in 3 Memoirs**

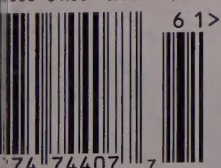
**Modern-Day
Sex Slaves**

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Sarah Bernhardt

Jewish Women's Salons

How to bring back the power of conversation

Lilith magazine, the print "salon" for Jewish women's conversations for nearly three decades, is now extending the excitement of Lilith into real-time talk.

A Lilith salon is more free-flowing than a book club, not as spiritual as a rosh hodesh group nor as democratic as the PTA, and more intimate than a lecture. Lilith salons are gatherings where a dozen or so people meet in a home for an evening of good talk, refreshment, and renewed energy. Each salon has a "trigger" topic pegged to the latest issue of Lilith, but the conversation moves in whatever directions you take it.

Pilot Lilith salons are already meeting in three cities, and the participants rave about the experience:

"Thanks so much for a wonderful and soulwarming evening. What went on in the Lilith salon is rare and precious, as evidenced by the intensity and excitement of the participants."

"We got into a fabulous discussion of the article on Our Bodies Ourselves. The talk morphed into what girls think of feminism today, and why does Lilith say 'frankly feminist' on the cover?"

"Such a diverse and fascinating group of Lilith readers; the oldest was in her 80s and the youngest in her 20s."

To launch a Lilith salon in your own living room, gather a list of about a dozen of your friends and contact salons@Lilith.org. We'll provide conversation starters and suggestions from women who have hosted Lilith salons. (If some of your friends aren't already subscribers, they can take care of this important detail at Lilith.org, or by calling 1-888-2-LILITH.)

And in case you are lucky enough to live where a Lilith salon is launching, we'll try to match you up. Salons@Lilith.org.

—The Editors



Why is this magazine called Lilith? In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said “We are equal because we are created from the same earth.”
—from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, 23a-b

The Truth, in 3 New Memoirs:

10 **Momifesto** by Karen Prager

A stay-at-home mother reflects on her Harvard degree.

12 **Sorrel Summer** by Marlene B. Samuels

The daughter of Holocaust survivors passes through a narrow opening into her mother's own girlhood.

14 **First Wednesday** by Barbara Gingold

In cutthroat Washington, the writer's younger sister managed to create a new tradition, quintessentially Jewish and feminist. Why does it live on—in Jerusalem—after cancer claims her?

17 **Female Merit Badges** by Mary Yeager

Mascara, tampons, and black lace bras—collect the whole set!

18 **Abba Kovner Listened** a poem by Laurie Suzanne Lessen-Reiche, the winner of Lilith's Charlotte Newberger poetry competition.

20 **Flight** a short story by Phyllis Carol Agins

24 **Jewish Moms, Chinese Daughters** by Merri Rosenberg

Single Jewish women adopt the orphans of China's one-child-only policy. Now the first wave of these Chinese daughters prepares for bat mitzvah. Plus...how the offspring of Jewish-Chinese intermarriages celebrate.

28 **Modern-Day Sex Slaves** by Ilana Kramer

“Right around the corner from me!” The hidden trafficking of girls and women in the U.S. and Israel; who is try to free these captives?

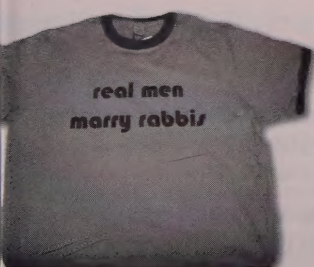
48 **What's in Your Wallet?** That Ominous Organ Donation Card by Melanie Weiss



34



28



4

d e p a r t m e n t s

2 **From the Editor** Susan Weidman Schneider on telling some truths in our lives, and lying for political expediency (especially in South Dakota).

4 **Voices** NEWS OF JEWISH WOMEN EVERYWHERE

“The L Word” • Who marries rabbis? • Sarah Bernhardt adored and reviled • Melinda Kramer enlists Dar Williams and Bonnie Raitt to sing for environmental action • Betty Friedan, in retrospect • The Israeli army learns to cry, thanks to women soldiers • Remembering Wendy Wasserstein • Previewing a Gertrude Berg revival • Ritualwell.org • NYU strike spawns a new generation of Jewish women labor leaders.

34 **Lilith's Eye on Arts and Culture**

Merri Rosenberg interviews Dara Horn and reviews *The World to Come* and Nicole Krauss's *The History of Love* • Hannah S. Pressman on Aharon Megged's *Mandrakes from the Holy Land*, Liz Kilstein on Lara Vapnyar's *Memoirs of a Muse* • Ilana Kurshan on Savyon Liebrecht's *A Good Place for the Night* • Rebecca Schwartz on Maggie Anton's *Rashi's Daughters* and Sylvie Weil's *My Guardian Angel* • Julia Wolf Mazow on *Without Shame* by Adaia Shumsky • Faye Moskowitz on Marsha Gessen's *Ester and Ruzya* • Laura Levitt on *Why Aren't Women Circumcised?* by Shaye Cohen • Gillian Steinberg on Arielle Greenberg's *My Kafka Century*.

46 **Happening** LILITH'S INDISPENSABLE RESOURCE LISTINGS compiled by Naomi Danis

Cover: Sarah Bernhardt as Adrienne Lecouvreur, by W. & D. Downey, Harvard Theatre Collection.



In six days we lost three stellar women: Betty Friedan, Coretta Scott King, Wendy Wasserstein. At Coretta Scott King's funeral, heads of state and regular folks paid their respects in a very public way. Celebrating the lives (and mourning the loss) of Betty Friedan and Wendy Wasserstein, we're still penning appraisals, eulogies, reminiscences.

These two Jewish women, born 30 years apart, shared a gift. Each had the power to see, and then to name. Friedan labeled the constricted life smart women were condemned to lead "the feminine mystique." Wasserstein—out loud in her women's onstage voices, and in her own voice in her wry confessional essays—enunciated the complications that ensue for women in the generations after Friedan. But what fascinates, in the end, is how these two lived their *own* lives.

Betty Friedan spoke (rather obliquely) about cooking for the new man in her life, and then about the shifts when a child took on strict Jewish religious practice. (In *Lilith's* 1976 premier issue, Friedan revealed why she speaks out as a woman and a Jew. You can read that landmark piece—"Friedan at 55"—on our website, Lilith.org.) Wendy Wasserstein, when she decided to bear and raise a daughter as an unmarried, unpartnered working woman, wrote revealingly about what this choice actually felt like.

Most of us learn more from personal anecdote than from polemics. That's the power of memoir. You'll read in this issue three cut-to-the-bone memoirs, in a tradition of truth-telling recently under fire not from the category-bending nonfiction novel (google "Capote") but from the new genre of fictionalized truth (google "Frey"). A determined, Harvard-educated, stay-at-home mom; the middle-aged daughter of Holocaust survivors; and the bereaved (think "bereft") sister of a cancer victim each expose a moment in their lives, and we are the privileged witnesses.

The personal *is* political, but the obverse is what's more worrisome. Right now politics is a powerful vector bearing down on the personal lives of women. In this same season as we mourn the loss of Betty Friedan, founder of the National Organization for Women, the state legislature in South Dakota has outlawed abortion.

The last time Betty and I talked, a few years back, was in front of the Supreme Court building in Washington. My younger daughter, Yael, and I were part of a reproductive rights demonstration. Betty was resting on a low concrete bench, but when we spoke it was clear that she was as feisty as ever, righteously angry at the forces keeping women down. Friedan is remembered as a person who was ready, almost to the end, to put her own body on the march to drive change. What would she say now?

Though it's right there when we consult an atlas, for most people this state is off the map. I once lived for a year in South Dakota, on the Cheyenne River Sioux Indian reservation in the tiny town of Eagle Butte (pop. 500). I know first hand that the state is vast and the small settlements isolated. The distance between towns is great, winter driving often a hazard, and the lives of many women there can be harsh: teen pregnancy, suicide, entrenched poverty, a parched future.

July 1, abortion will be illegal in South Dakota, except if the mother's life is endangered by the pregnancy. No exception. Not even when the woman or girl is pregnant as a result of rape or incest.

Forced pregnancy. The lack of compassion on the part of lawmakers—and the so-called pro-life organizations that support them—is stunning and terrifying. And yet I found little recognition of what this means when I polled, informally, Jewish women I encountered randomly at parents' meetings or intermission at the theater. One told me nonchalantly, "Look, women will always find some way to get an abortion." Are you kidding me? Access to abortion already excruciatingly challenging if you are a poor and/or young woman in South Dakota. No money to travel to another state. No one to care for the children at home even if you could manage to get to Minnesota. And now the additional horror and stigma of believing you are committing an illegal act. If the law criminalizing abortion stands, anyone in South Dakota—physician or friend—who assists a woman to obtain an abortion may face fines and jail time too.

Betty Friedan once said—astringently, not facetiously—that no one likes abortion, just as no one likes dental work, but both are sometimes necessary. Keep in mind how awful those days (and years) were before abortion became safe and legal in the U.S. The back-alley abortions. The brave women of the organization "Jane" who performed safe and illegal abortions for thousands of women in the 1960s and early 1970s. Don't imagine that those days are history. A blogger has now put onto her website a message to women in South Dakota with careful instructions on how to perform an abortion. My God.

When memoir invites us in as a privileged witness

Susan

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Newstand price: \$4.95 Canada: \$6.95
Individual subscriptions: \$24.97/4 issues
Institutions: \$30/4 issues Canada: add \$6/year
Overseas: add \$8/year (U.S. funds only)
Single copies: \$7, prepaid (includes postage)

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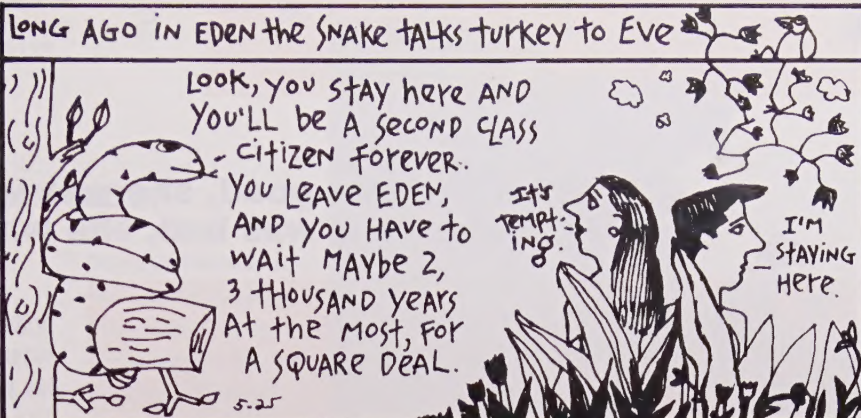
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Retailers: To carry LILITH, call (888) 254-5484 or
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LILITH is published by Lilith Publications, Inc.,
a non-profit organization.

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reserved under international and Pan American
Conventions. Associate member American Jewish
Press Association. Available from University Micro-
films International and on tape from the Jewish
Braille Institute of America. ISSN 0146-2334.

LILITH occasionally makes its mailing list available to
organizations or publishers. If you do not want to
receive such mail, please send label and request to:
LILITH, Dept. LIL, PO Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834.
PRINTED IN CANADA



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When she was good, she was very, very good And when she was bad, she was . . . Jewish



FELIX NADAR (FRENCH, 1820-1910). SARAH BERNHARDT, C. 1900. ALBUMEN PRINT, 8.58 X 6.38 IN. (21.8 X 16.3 CM). BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE, DÉPARTEMENT DES ESTAMPES, PARIS

From "Sarah Bernhardt:
The Art of High Drama"
at The Jewish Museum,
New York.

Born in Paris in 1844, **Sarah Bernhardt**—arguably the most famous actress in the world—was the daughter not only of a courtesan, but also of a Jew. Although Bernhardt was baptized and raised as a Catholic, her origins as a Jewish woman were somehow never eradicated from the public eye.

In "Sarah Bernhardt, the Art of High Drama," a show currently on view at The Jewish Museum in New York City, curators **Carol Ockman** and **Kenneth Silver** make this powerfully clear by their inclusion of several chilling anti-Semitic renditions of the fabled actress, such as an 1886 caricature in which Bernhardt stands on a carpet of gold coins, a pointed reference to her supposed Jewish greed, and another, from 1878, where she

is shown in profile, flaunting her hooked and bulging "Jewish" nose. Still another image shows her face superimposed over a large Jewish star. The catalogue which accompanies the show quotes the highly anti-Semitic and character-defaming pseudo-biography of Bernhardt, in which its author, the lesser-known actress **Marie Colombier**, claims her rival possesses "the commercial intelligence inherent to her race," a "lust for profit," the "instincts of a daughter of Israel" as well as a general "disorder and . . . oriental laissez-faire." As Ockman and Silver aptly point out, "...when she was praised, her Catholicism was often mentioned, and when she was criticized, she was more often identified as Jewish."

Bernhardt herself was not in the least intimidated by this ruthless hounding. She sued Colombier, the author of the so-called biography; as a result, Colombier was convicted of slander, fined and imprisoned for two months. During the Dreyfus Affair, Bernhardt openly proclaimed her alliance with **Emile Zola**, Dreyfus's famed champion. And she had a long and bitter falling out with her only son, who was both an outspoken anti-Semite and anti-Dreyfusard.

It is interesting to note that another famous actress, **Marilyn Monroe**, converted to Judaism when she married playwright **Arthur Miller**. Yet when she divorced Miller, she did not give up her attachment to the Jewish faith, and among her personal effects, auctioned by Christie's in 1999, was her 1956 conversion certificate and a menorah that played the Israeli national anthem. Monroe's Judaism, however, is rarely treated as anything more than a quirky footnote, a mildly interesting aside. The Jewishness of a woman who actively chooses to be a Jew is not worth notice, but one who was born a Jew and did not identify as such was marked by a hideous and indelible stain.

It is a testament to Bernhardt's remarkable gifts as an actress and the indomitable force of her personality—after a knee injury sustained onstage caused the partial amputation of a leg, she nonetheless had herself carried to the front during WWI, to give moral support to the French troops—that she's remembered and celebrated today, despite her having been a Jew, and perhaps, in some deeper sense, because of it as well.

—Yona Zeldis McDonough

On Strike Again, 100 Years Later

As a doctoral candidate studying Jewish history at New York University, I have long enjoyed a scholarly relationship with Jewish female turn-of-the-century labor leaders like **Rose Schneiderman**, **Clara Lemlich**, and **Pauline Newman**. But this past fall, as the Graduate Student Union at NYU struggled for a work contract, I became involved in a fight for labor rights that took me out of the archives, out of the classroom, and onto the picket line.

I entered NYU in 2002, the first year that NYU graduate students worked under a union contract. Our agreement stipulated that in exchange for six semesters of work as a teaching or research assistant or as an instructor, I would receive five years of full health insurance and a stipend of about \$16,000 the first year with modest increases annually. (Before the union, graduate stipends averaged \$10,000 a year and did not include any benefits.)

Last August, the University administration refused to re-negotiate a contract with our union. They left us with no system of grievances to protect the benefits we'd won under the previous contract, and reduced our health benefits. When demonstrations and open letters to the administration did not convince the university to open negotiations, we voted to strike. Hundreds of us walked out of our jobs and onto the picket line.

When Rose Schneiderman and Clara Lemlich struck their garment shops in 1909, violent skirmishes with the police and hired thugs punctuated their picketing. Our picket lines are neither as frightening nor as exciting. Instead, we are cold,

.....
"You never conquer a mountain. You stand on the summit a few brief moments and then the wind blows your footprints away."
.....

Arlene Blum, mountain climbing pioneer, in her new book Breaking Trail: A Climbing Life.
.....

bored and exhausted. We walk in circles, keep our spirits up by chanting and ask passing vehicles to honk in support.

At the time of this writing, there is no resolution in sight for the NYU graduate students. Knowing we can be locked out of our jobs at any moment makes us sharply aware of how vulnerable we are without the security of a union contract.

Next time I teach my students about Lemlich, Schneiderman and Newman, I hope to do it under the protection of the labor movement that these remarkable women helped to build.

—Rachel Kranson



Rachel Kranson and Daniella Doron.

Ritualwell.org

Chapter 1, verse 1 of *Pirkei Avot* (the Ethics of the Fathers) reminds us to "build a fence around the Torah." But what if that fence had a gate in it?

This is just what the creators of ritualwell.org are working on. Ritual is an ancient way of sanctifying and really paying attention to important events of all sorts, but as the people behind ritualwell.org say, "Sometimes Jewish tradition does not yet have in place the ritual that will fill our need." The answer? To choose from a variety of new rituals, posted on the site, or to follow the directions towards making your own new, meaningful, Jewishly connected ritual.

The people behind ritualwell.org, including Kolot, the Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, and Ma'yan, the Jewish women's project at the JCC in Manhattan, are concerned with providing feminist-, queer- and interfaith-friendly rites. The site includes new spins on more traditional rituals, such as daily prayers over food rewritten in "alternative feminine God-language," with phrases such as "Beruchah At Yah Eloheynu Ruach Ha'olam"—"You are blessed, O God, Spirit of the World." The new rituals listed also take language into careful consideration, even down to the prayer for driving, suitable for when an adolescent gets a driver's license ("Our God and God of our ancestors... Help me to drive with care—keeping a safe distance, with manners—giving the right of way, with awareness—so as to stop in time..."). It is clear that ritualwell.org works very hard to be inclusive, open and Jewishly relevant.

—Melanie Weiss



Rabbis Marry People. Who Marries Rabbis?

I was walking near Columbia University one morning, and saw a woman wearing a T-shirt that said "Real Men Marry Doctors." I said to myself, "I need to make that for rabbis!"...so I did!

I wanted to sell them for \$15, and in order to do that, I needed to sell at least 15 of them. I passed an email around just to friends, and asked them to send it to people that they thought would be interested. For the first round, we sold 29 shirts. When people saw them, the idea spread like wildfire. Within days, I sold another 47! Now it has been posted on listservs around the country.

Of course the shirt is empowering to young female rabbis (and rabbinical students), particularly single ones, who feel that even though their schools welcome them with open arms, they're still breaking into a male-dominated profession. The slogan helps to normalize the idea of marrying a woman who also happens to be a rabbi. If she's an already-married female rabbi, the slogan on the shirt validates the choice her husband has made.

The shirt was intended for heterosexual women, but I love that it also works for gay men. I've heard jokes about making a spin-off that says "real rabbis marry men" (changing the use of the verb "marry," and the message of the T-shirt), but that's another story.

—Rachel Silverman (racheariel@gmail.com)

Miss Yeshiva Girl

It's two in the morning, and my girlfriend and I are watching another episode of "The L Word," Showtime's sitcom, now in its third season. We rent whole seasons at a time on DVD and then watch the episodes in marathon sessions. We are addicted to "The L Word" because it's about lesbians. A real show! About lesbians! And we find out in the show's second season that one of characters is even Jewish.

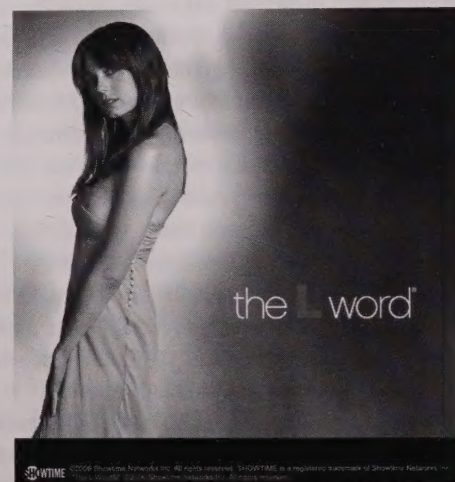
Jenny Schechter, played by **Mia Kirshner**, comes out of the closet, breaks things off with her boyfriend, has a steamy affair with an older woman, and writes short stories to explore unhappy childhood memories.

Then, during the show's second season, Jenny slowly self-destructs. And woven right into her painful downward spiral is her connection to Judaism. The storyline begins with Jenny making a video for her mother with questions about their family history. "I would like to know if Zayde lost his mind when he began to transcribe the Torah by hand," she asks the camera, picking up a black-and-white picture of a man and a woman, he with a long beard and skullcap and she in a modest print dress. In the background, a cantor sings a High Holy Day prayer.

From this point forward, Jenny's Jewishness features prominently in each scene of her impending breakdown. She cries, rocks back and forth, and mumbles the prayer over Shabbat candles as she makes a scrapbook with family photos and creepy drawings. The soundtrack to painful images from her childhood is of her voice, whispering the *kiddush*, superimposed over a sad cello. As Jenny nears rock-bottom, she gets a job as a stripper at a seedy bar. She calls herself "Miss Yeshiva Girl" and throws her clothes to screaming men

while whispered prayers and klezmer music play in her head.

This intense connection between Jewishness and trauma in Jenny's character has made some viewers uncomfortable. The show's creator and executive producer, **Ilene Chaiken**, says she was very deliberate about her choices. Chaiken is herself Jewish, and sees elements of her own history in Jenny's. "I'm in no way saying Jewishness is responsible for causing trauma in Jenny's life," says Chaiken. "It's about memory. It's about the fact that as suppressed memory comes back,



everything swirls together, and Jenny's memories are dominated by her childhood, her upbringing... [which] was dominated by Judaism and Jewish imagery." That Jenny is both the only Jewish character on the show and the only character who crashes and burns quite so spectacularly strike many as bad Jewish PR. And though it would be nice if Jenny's painful Jewish memories were counterbalanced by another character's well-adjusted and happy Jewish identity, Chaiken dismisses this criticism. "I don't have an obligation to simply...portray all lesbians or all Jewish people in a positive way. My obligation is to tell good stories."

—Beth Schwartzapfel

The Clever Grasshopper

Although men may sit at the helm of most of the nation's large and well-funded environmental institutions, when it comes to grassroots organizing, women are leading the way, whether Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai, or the thousands of community leaders, organizers and mothers working behind the scenes. 25-year-old **Melinda Kramer** is the one connecting them. Kramer got



her start as an intern—and later a coordinator—for Pacific Environment, building coalitions of environmentalists along the Pacific Rim. At an international conference that she was organizing, a member of the Russian delegation pulled her aside. "In our Aleut tradition, we give nicknames to special people," he said. "We would like you to be *Umni Kunyetchik*—or, Clever Grasshopper." The name makes sense; she's full of sprightly energy—and you can practically see the gears turning in her head as she figures out how to implement new ideas.

"I would meet women in Kenya, China, the Russian Far East, or here in Oakland—each of them entirely unaware of their counterparts working around the globe." Not content to just sit back

and kvetch about this disconnect, Kramer began thinking. Why not launch an international network that would bring these women together? "The idea was so simple—so necessary, I couldn't believe it hadn't been done before. As soon as I had the idea, I couldn't think about anything else. I went for a long walk at 11:30 at night in the Berkeley hills near my house. I called my mom. I didn't sleep that night. I stayed up till dawn and sketched out plans for a new organization."

Women's Global Green Action Network (wggan.org) was received enthusiastically not just by women activists from India to Germany, but also from musicians like **Bonnie Raitt** and **Dar Williams**, who kicked off the Network with generous contributions.

"It's been a wild ride," says Kramer. Now, the Network is gearing up for its first-ever caucus in Mexico City, planned to coincide with the international World Water Forum.

"What I've found is that it's not about being a Jewish organizer, or a Hindu organizer, or an African organizer," says Melinda. "It's about joining our individual voices to realize a common goal and grow a movement that transcends borders."

—Orli Cotel



World Environment Day

In *Lilith's* first issue we published Amy Stone's frank interview, "Friedan at 55." It begins:

Betty Friedan—matriarch of the women's movement, the woman who **founded the National Organization of Women** and was its first president, whose term "feminine mystique" is now part of the language and who **grew up with the triple burden of being intelligent, unattractive and Jewish** in Peoria, Illinois—is suddenly out in front as a Jew speaking out for Jews....How does Friedan at 55 relate her feminism to Judaism?

Go to Lilith.org to read the rest of this extraordinary conversation.

Betty Friedan (1921-2006)

"Betty Friedan died Saturday, February 4, 2006. It was her 85th birthday. Although she relished her status as an international "celebrity," I think of her as a cartographer. Early maps are never perfect. They have errors, omit essential places, and warn of mythical dragons, and some continents depicted turn out not to exist at all. Yet, lacking such early chartings, we would drift without any direction at all.

"History will record her death as the passing of a founding mother of the contemporary Women's Movement, co-founder of many national women's organizations, a sometimes abrasive but also warm woman. I hope she might also be remembered as our Mapmaker, whose legacy should live in our continuation to dare think of undiscovered lands—and then chart them, as best we can, with urgent deliberation."

—Alida Brill on womensmediacenter.com

The Israeli Army Learns to Cry

Postscript:

After the evacuation, at the urgent request of women soldiers, the army asked CCW to conduct 30 additional **workshops, to give the women a chance to ventilate and process their "life-changing" experience.** The upper echelon army officers involved concluded—somewhat to their own surprise—that CCW's intervention had had **a very positive effect on the soldiers** themselves and on the disengagement process in general. As a result, the Israeli army is now seeking cooperation in facilitating additional initiatives for women in the military, including a groundbreaking project to enable women in traditionally male, technologically-oriented jobs to succeed, both during and after their service in Zahal.

She is 18 years old, a slight young woman from Beersheva, in the anonymous khaki pants and shirt of *Zahal* (Israel Defense Forces, or IDF). A few feet away is another young woman, a baby in one arm and two toddlers hanging on to her long skirt. Cursing and screaming from under her headscarf: "I will torment you when you are pregnant! My eyes will haunt you when you are in labor! You will never build a home of your own!"

With extraordinary restraint, the soldier smiles at the children, stretches out her hand to them, and gets on, as gently as possible, with the grim mission at hand: trying to facilitate Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip by making the evacuation of Jewish settlers in Gush Katif fast, efficient and non-violent.

The soldier, and some 700 other female forces with no previous combat experience, were prepared for their difficult job in the disengagement process last August by a special project of the IDF, in conjunction with the Advisor to the Chief-of-Staff on Women's Issues and the Counseling Center for Women (CCW), Israel's only mental health center dedicated to the empowerment of women. CCW was founded as a not-for-profit in 1988 by ten feminist therapists, mostly immigrants from the U.S.; since then it has been a major force in bringing feminist psychotherapy to Israel and has acquired unique expertise and experience in the treatment of women, especially during times of crisis and trauma. Nevertheless, it was with some hesitation that Israel's army—a prototypically male organization—accepted CCW's proposal to help train women soldiers charged with evacuating the women and children from Gush Katif.

"Zahal tends to view male coping mechanisms as the most efficient way of dealing with these types of missions," says **Rakefet Ginsburg**, coordinator of the project for CCW and herself a former member of the IDF's mental health division. "Female coping mechanisms are seen as weaknesses in the army. This put female soldiers, as a group, at great risk for crisis and trauma both during and after the disengagement."

Political issues also emerged among the Center's staff: some therapists did not believe that the disengagement would solve Israel's problems, and it was an effort for them to accept helping the military rather than the settlers.

"What ultimately made the decision for us,"

recalls **Karen Shachar**, a CCW psychologist, "was that all of our children go into the army at 18. In Gaza, many of the soldiers felt they were doing something against their own people. They're trained to protect Israel, not deal with disengagement.... We have no choice: the defense of Israel is primary."

During the intense weeks running up to the disengagement, as the military and the public prepared for a variety of cataclysmic scenarios, CCW fanned out to military bases throughout the country. In 100-degree heat, in drab army dining rooms and on bunk beds in windowless bedrooms, therapists conducted 49 four-hour workshops aimed at sensitizing 700 young, apprehensive women to the events that were about to take place, helping them find inner resources to cope with traumatic experiences, reinforcing their assertiveness.

According to Rakefet, "Our message was:

'You are no weaker than the guys in the army. Your strength lies in your empathy,

your ability to identify with the women and children of Gush Katif, and your courage to say what you're feeling.'"

CCW's team taught the soldiers how to use relaxation techniques, avoid aggression, defend themselves against physical and verbal violence, express their feelings and support each other. One delicate young woman, from a religiously observant family who opposed the disengagement, was torn: Should she give in to her parents' pressure and withdraw from her unit, or perform her civic duty and serve with her comrades? The CCW workshop gave her the strength to cope with her doubts, and she did participate in the evacuation.

Another soldier, typical of many, was worried. "I'll be heartbroken if I have to tear a crying child out of her mother's arms," she declared, at the end of a workshop. "But if that child looks up and sees my caring face and warm smile, perhaps she will always remember it as a ray of light on that dark day."

Moriah Shlomot, director of CCW, summed up the experience: "An army equipped with genuine tears—and not just tear gas—can develop a more effective dialogue with the civilian populations." The women soldiers, she adds, were "the true heroines of the evacuation."

—Barbara Gingold

Wendy Wasserstein (1950-2006)

"My work is often thought of as lightweight commercial comedy," Wasserstein told *The Paris Review* in 1997, "and **I have always thought, No, you don't understand: this is in fact a political act.** 'The Sisters Rosensweig' had the largest advance in Broadway history," for a play (not a musical). Therefore, she continued, "nobody is going to turn down a play on Broadway because a woman wrote it or because it's about women." When Ms. Wasserstein won the best-play Tony for "Heidi Chronicles," **it was the first time a woman had won the prize solo.**

—From the obituary by Christopher Isherwood in the *New York Times*, January 30, 2006

"Yoo hoo!"

Once upon a time, before Monica's parents on "Friends" or the mother-in-law on "Mad About You," there was a strong and sympathetic prime-time Jewish mother.

For 17 years on radio and seven years on TV, from 1929 to 1956, **Gertrude Berg** embodied everyone's mother on *The Goldbergs*.

Berg was proud of being Jewish, and her "Molly Goldberg" spoke with a heavy Yiddish accent. Resonating from the everyday life of an immigrant family to the larger culture, this Jewishness was not just colorful ethnic spice in her optimistic America. She brought to the public the Holocaust and the pressures of assimilation, from nose jobs to children leaving the old neighborhood. She drew inspiration from her childhood and conversations overheard in Lower East Side restaurants, and her scripts glittered with inventive malapropisms. (One favorite: "When we get to the bridge, I'll burn it.") But character development shaped her stories more than quick laughs.

Molly Goldberg's significance was lauded recently at the Museum of Television & Radio in New York. In a panel discussion, documentary filmmaker **Aviva Kempner** previewed clips of interviews and restored "Goldbergs" excerpts from her forthcoming film "Gertrude Berg: America's Molly Goldberg." Kempner says she's intrigued by "under-known Jewish heroes," a fascination demonstrated in her award-winning "The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg."

Two biographies of Berg are in the works: *Molly's World: The Life of Gertrude Berg*, by **David Zurawik**, and **Pete Smith's** *It's Your America: Gertrude Berg and American Broadcasting, 1929-1956*. Maybe the film and the books are precursors of a Gertrude Berg renaissance. Berg

broke ground as an artist and entrepreneur. With full creative control, she wrote and produced 10,000 scripts, all typed by her husband. "Writing is work!" the Emmy- and Tony-award-winning actress declared to **Edward R. Murrow** in a "Person to Person" interview. She wrote from six to nine each morning "when the phone doesn't ring."

Owning the rights to her series, Berg also had unusual financial control. On radio and TV she was a Bronx housewife welcoming America in through her window above Tremont Avenue ("Yoo hoo, Mrs. Bloom!"). But Berg in her own home was an elegant Park Avenue intellectual, presiding over an apartment salon filled with art, books, people and good food, her grandson fondly recalled.

Her personas united to battle McCarthyism and anti-Semitism when **Philip Loeb**, the actor who played her onstage husband, was blacklisted. She fought hard for him, and after his tragic firing she was penalized for her loyalty. Her film, Kempner says, will document this struggle.

Panelists concluded that the networks' rush to disassociate themselves from Berg—she was driven from CBS to NBC to the DuMont network and then to syndication as she lost sponsors—fed the amnesia about how powerful this Jewish woman and her "Molly" were in shaping popular culture.

—Nora Lee Mandel



Momifesto

by Karen Prager

S ometime during our first semester at college, in the fall of 1987, I mentioned to a male friend that I intended to stay home to raise my children. He said that if that was the case, I shouldn't be taking up a space at Harvard that could go to somebody who would actually make good use of it. I was appalled.

Later that year, I declared my major: women's studies.

I suppose that to most people this seems strange. To me, it makes complete sense. When I tell people that I majored in women's studies, they correctly assume that I am a feminist. However, they usually do not know what that means. It doesn't mean that I hate men, or that I want to be one. It doesn't mean that I don't shave under my arms (although I don't). It does mean that I think that women—all people, in fact—must have the right to self-determination.

My feminism is a broad movement for human freedom, in the spirit of the nineteenth-century collaboration of Frederick Douglass and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. My feminism finds any orthodoxy—whether it states that women should follow Donna Reed or Andrea Dworkin—repugnant. To paraphrase Rebecca West: "I do not know precisely what a feminist is. I only know that people call me one whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat."

He said if I was going
to stay home with my
(as yet unborn) kids,
I shouldn't be at Harvard.

And, true to my word that day in 1987, here I am, a feminist and a "stay-at-home" mother to my four-year-old son, Noah. Our family of three, which includes my husband, Mark, manages to live on what Mark earns as high school history teacher. Noah won't be having any fancy birthday parties, but we're all fed and clothed, we own our own house, and we go out for Chinese food and ice cream every Sunday night. We have enough for now.

When people ask me if I work, I say yes, I just don't get paid for it. I've had many ridiculous conversations on the subject. "What do you *do* all day?" a retired, never-married social worker recently asked me. By now I am tired of the

Mothering is the anti-fame, the anti-fortune. My byline is on this piece, but not on my son.

questions, and I told her that I live my life, with my son next to me. She seemed immensely relieved a few moments later to learn that I also tutor from time to time—at least I do *something*.

So where did this come from, the appalling yet widespread notion that leaving the paid workforce to raise one's children is a waste of a good education?

The idea reveals some common prejudices—about education, about money, and about childrearing.

First, it assumes that paid employment is the only legitimate use for higher education, with the corollary assumptions that mothering doesn't use the knowledge acquired in college and that paid work does. This has not been my experience. My pre-baby work as an editor required a certain basic literacy and facility with words, but beyond that, it demanded what every job demands: skills that I learned on the job. Of the many titles that I edited, I can think of only one, a book on Shakespeare, that actually made use of what I'd learned in college.

My college friend's comment also presumes that earning money is more important than childrearing, with a concomitant devaluation of childrearing. This is not all that surprising. Our culture values fame and fortune, and mothering is guaranteed to yield neither. In fact, mothering is the anti-fame, the anti-fortune. Almost every other job that people do earns some type of recognition—at the very least, a paycheck. My byline is on this piece, but it is not on my son. And as wonderful as Noah is, he does not ever come to me and say, Thanks, Mom, for raising me.

So why do I do what I do? First, I have come to realize that fame and fortune are not important enough to me. Certainly they have their perks, but one usually pays dearly for a lot of money. Once I had Noah, the idea of leaving him to go back to editing was absurd to me. I didn't even like to go to the supermarket without him, so how was I going to leave him for most of the day, most of the week?

Here is the bottom line: Noah needed me and I needed him. My husband and I chose to bring him into the world,

and it was our responsibility to meet his needs. And, as far as I could tell, his most basic need was for me.

What of my pedigree? Am I not wasting the precious Harvard diploma stored in my basement? Conventional wisdom has it that a Harvard diploma might as well be a winning lottery ticket: it sets you up for life. Frankly, I wouldn't know. I was never interested in fields that lead to high-paying jobs (law, medicine), or those that lead to insanely high-paying jobs (economics, hedge-fund studies). But I have found that my women's studies degree has come in handy in unexpected ways. Once, grocery shopping at Whole Foods, I looked up to see a large quotation on permanent display over a refrigerated case. It has been one of my favorite quotes ever since I read *A Room of One's Own* in my first women's studies course: "One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well." Below it, in smaller letters, read "—George Bernard Shaw." Suffice it to say the mistake no longer adorns the dairy section.

I knew as soon as I began reading *A Room of One's Own* in the spring of my freshman year that it would stay with me always. I would have been less inclined to believe that Cherrie Moraga's first-person account of Chicana lesbian sado-masochism, part of the reading list for my junior tutorial, would also resonate with me personally. And then my son met the little boy across the street. They had a tumultuous love affair all spring. When apart, they pined for each other, calling passionately across the road to one another at all hours. When together, they fought. One afternoon, as I watched a masked Ethan beat Noah about the face and neck with a large foam sword, as Noah squealed with delight, I had an epiphany. I remembered Moraga's statement that the "bottom" in an S/M couple had the power. It was s/he who controlled the action. Noah was the bottom! Imagine my relief.

Obviously, my feminism informs who I am and how I raise my son. Most profoundly, it has allowed me to view what I do as work. Mothering is my full-time job. The women I met in the mothers' group I joined when Noah was an infant know me by my maiden name, which I use professionally, because in my view they are professional associates. My husband and I divvy up the household chores, just as we did when I worked outside the home. So, although I miss my paycheck, I am very happy with my decision to raise Noah full time. I am one of the few people I know who are actually doing what they want to with their lives, and for this I consider myself very lucky indeed.

Karen Prager lives her life, with her son next to her, in Teaneck, New Jersey. kprager@momifesto.com

Sorrel Summer

by Marlene B Samuels



She holds the leaf out for my approval—newly sprouted sorrel that grows wild on the hillsides. My mother is excited by the find, an excitement she hopes I'll share. She treats me as though I'm much older than my 10 years because so much of the time I am. We stroll and chat while the tall grasses tickle my scabby legs. Summer in Canada is our favorite time of the entire year, quite possibly the happiest for the four of us. We're in the Laurentian Mountains, a few hours north of Montreal by car. "The country," is what my parents and their friends call the area. It's become the warm-weather haven for Holocaust survivors, their unique version of summer camp. The Laurentian villages are replete with vestiges of old Europe. And here everything blossoms overnight. Here, there is so much day, so little night.

My mother's petite hands are rough from too much sewing, chapped from cooking, and always too much cleaning. But with the glossy leaf cradled between her two finger-tips, the hands seem different. They assume a refreshed aura as though belonging to someone else, maybe to a woman who serves her friends tea in the parlor. Briefly, I see only the delicate bend of her wrist; sun glistens on the leaf, reflects from her golden hair. My mother marvels at the leaf's symmetry, turning it slowly to admire such total perfection.

Canada's Laurentian Mountains became a kind of summer camp for Holocaust survivors.

From our place on the ridge, I can see my father on the gravel driveway of our cottage. It's a clapboard shack of a place that they rent each summer for the season. He and my brother scurry back and forth from car to porch steps repeatedly, carrying boxes filled with dry goods. An unpleasant exchange between them progresses. I can't hear their voices over cricket chirps and loud crow calls but see the dust plumes my brother creates as he kicks at gravel with each step forward.

"Here, taste this!" My mother demands.

I had forgotten all about the sorrel, preoccupied with the scene unfolding in the driveway. My mother yanks me back to the moment, insisting in her way that I share her memory. She begins to tell me a splinter of her story.

"In Romania, when I was a young girl, my mother used to

My mother is remembering her other life. “If spring-time could have a taste,” she said, “it would be wild sorrel soup.”

make soup out of something just like this. *Sauerblaten*—that’s what she called it, sour leaves. But now I’m sure it was this, wild sorrel.” She smiles so slightly that only those closest to her could recognize it as a smile. There is a spontaneous movement of lips, one that raises her left cheek a tiny bit higher than the right one. This gesture is also her unique signal that long vaulted memories are about to be unlocked.

“Sometimes my mother would put little thin-skinned potatoes into the soup, you know, new potatoes—ones with barely a peel? She’d boil them just so, not too much or the skins would crack. Then, right before serving us, she’d drop big spoonfuls of sour cream into each bowl. How can I describe to you how really wonderful this tasted? Ah, what I would give to have this now, especially served by my mother.” She continues. Her voice softens, slowing down the way it does when she’s falling asleep. Watching her, my mother seems to be talking only to herself. “Oh, you would love it. Oh, she would love you.”

But her eyes reflect too much sunlight and too much sky in tears she holds in check. Aware of my every swallow, I begin to feel anxious. There’s no way for me to comfort her, to try to make things less sad for her. From many times like this one I know that my mother is remembering her other life, one in which she too had a mother. Her face tells me her life was a good one. She had been a happy young woman. But that was before the war, before the words—concentration camp, evoked unspeakable sorrows.

“You know, if springtime could have a taste,” she says, “then I’m sure it would be wild sorrel soup. I know it because I’ve lived that taste of springtime in Romania, in mountains so much like these.”

My father ascends the grassy hill leading up from our driveway. Scrambling to the top, his eyes fixate on my lips as the shiny leaf disappears behind them. Watching him, I smile, but his face is in transformation. It’s a succession of faces—shock, rage, and lonely distress.

“What’s the matter with you?” He snaps at my mother in Yiddish. This is a new breed of sound I’ve never before heard from him. It lays hidden deep within his chest, a voice that dwells between whispers and growls.

“Didn’t you eat enough grass in the camps? It’s disgraceful what you’re doing. How can you behave like this now, in this place?” He’s hissing as he admonishes her, cursing in Polish. My father spits onto the ground vigorously to display his disgust the way the old Jews in our ghetto neighborhood do.

I stop chewing. The masticated leaf wad sits inside my cheek, begging to be chewed some more. Instead, I will my mouth to freeze, to settle and to relax. The sorrel’s sweet-sour taste languishes on my tongue. I believe in my power to help end my father’s distress. Why is eating leaves so wrong if they taste like sorrel? I am not able to understand why my mother would have eaten grass but the dilemma makes me gasp for breath. It’s weighing down upon me like our fat cat sitting on my chest.

In *eine augenblick*—the blink of an eye—my pure childhood pleasure is distorted into a feeling I recognize as it emerges. It’s shame that warms my cheeks now, that’s turning my face red hot, stinging like dirty jokes and pictures of naked people.

“Meyer, it’s not what you think.” My mother speaks slowly, her voice barely audible. “We have to think back before that time. It’s for our children we must remember when *sauerblaten* meant springtime, family gatherings, and nothing more. Nothing more. Please, let’s not think about our other times. Please?”

There’s a special secret my parents share between them and among only their few closest friends. It’s a secret they whisper about to each other at night, in the dark as the house around them slumbers. Sometimes the whispers become cries and then fade away to whimpers. It’s this secret they talk about now.

They reach an accord—one of so many in the life they’ve made together. Their marriage, based entirely upon such accords, is also based upon a multitude of shared secrets. They surface in minute drips that leak out unexpectedly at times like this one.

Neither of them speaks. There’s nothing more to say. Their silence lacks awkwardness and if there had been any at all, nature’s surrounding hum creates the perfect foil. Instead, they each look off toward a different distance, scanning lush hilltops and aquamarine skies. They absorb it all but not together—each lost in secret, sad thoughts.

They look at me in unison as though they’d forgotten me entirely but then suddenly remembered. Their faces have regained composure. In unison, they begin to smile and together they take hold of my little hands, one on either side. My father kisses me on top of my head and, as a threesome, we begin to walk.

“Come,” says my father. “Jacob is waiting for us.” My brother watches us from the driveway. Carefully, slowly, we make our way down the grassy knoll. As we approach him, my mother resumes her story about sorrel soup, sour cream, and the taste of springtime in the mountains.

Marlene Samuels is an independent researcher, co-author and editor of *The Seamstress: A Memoir of Survival*, and author of an academic book about success. She lives in Chicago where she is writing a book about adopted children.

First Wednesday

by Barbara Gingold

The month of May, 2005, began on a Sunday. Outside my window, birdsong rang from one old pine tree to another, drowning the snorts of the first Egged bus making its way up my sleepy Jerusalem street. Six A.M.—far too early to wake up, too late to hope to doze again. It was one year since my sister Diane died, and I still couldn't sleep well, couldn't absorb the loss, couldn't accept the soul-shattering absence of my sister across the globe.

The birds in my garden were singing like their North American cousins did in the maple trees and dogwoods around Di's little guest room in Washington, DC, where I'd spent so many difficult days and months. I'd been part of her support team as she fought her determined three-year battle against cancer. Now there was nothing more I could do for her. But as her first *yahrzeit* approached—the Hebrew date, the “secular” date, and the exact moment, 365 days to the minute she breathed her last breath—I had a gnawing feeling that there was still something I had to do, something for me if not for her.

In a city synonymous with cutthroat ambition, Diane established a new tradition—friendly, feminist and instinctively Jewish.

I tossed in bed, cursed the early-morning birds and buses and the bright lattice of sunlight beginning to shine through the shutters. The date, I thought. The date: maybe I should first decide *when* to observe the *yahrzeit*, and the *how* would come to me later. I forced myself back a year, to Diane's room in the hospice in Virginia, to the nightly shifts as her breaths became more and more labored, to my dread of being there with her and my dread of not being there for her.

She died on Wednesday morning, the fourth of May. And suddenly it dawned on me, as the new day dawned in Jerusalem: Diane died on the first Wednesday of the month! How could we not have noticed? First Wednesday—one of my sister's beloved “brainchilds,” the day she'd made special

*In Memory of
Diane Gingold Landfield
1948-2004*

30 smart, creative, successful women—and so many of us had been touched by cancer...

for a wide circle of friends and colleagues. Long a single businesswoman, a first-class networker and wonderful hostess, Diane decided in the early 1990s to invite all these women friends and colleagues she saw too infrequently to a monthly evening of socializing at her house on the edge of Washington. Whether monthly or, eventually, semi-annually, whether it fell on Wednesday or (as circumstances often had it) on a Tuesday or a Thursday, First Wednesday at Di's became a Washington institution.

The format was always the same: light refreshments (featuring "Mom's chocolate chip cake," baked by Diane the night before); enthusiastic shmoozing, and then the formal program. Every First Wednesday, one of Di's friends volunteered to speak about one of the nonprofit organizations she supported—generally one that benefited other women. After the talk and questions and answers, a big straw hat was passed around the room, a little bundle of cash accumulating for the evening's chosen charity.

In a city synonymous with infinite personal ambition and cutthroat competition, Diane established a new tradition, feminist and Jewish, instinctively combining warm home hospitality and the friendship of other women for the sake of doing a *mitzvah*, contributing an anonymous gift to *tzedakah*. After her death, the First Wednesday women, many of whom were not Jewish, knew that there was no better way to honor Di's memory than to meet again in Washington to express their love and respect for her.

Thirty days after her funeral, they held what I called Diane's *shloshim*, marking the end of our first month of mourning. There was no chocolate chip cake, no official program, no comforting words of Hebrew. On that First Wednesday there were, instead, reminiscences and inspiration, laughter and tears, as those who knew my sister told how much her boundless generosity and professional dynamism had contributed to their lives. Some of the long years I'd been in Israel, far from Diane's daily doings, took on more shape, got filled in with details I'd never known of her rich and enthusiastic life. And the straw hat filled up with contributions for the women's scholarship fund that Diane and her best friend, Alice Herman, had established in tribute to their friendship, forged in freshman days at Douglass College.

For the first time since Di's death, I jumped out of bed early and energetically. Finally I knew: the first Wednesday in May would be Diane's *yahrzeit*, and it would be First Wednesday/*Revi'i Ha-rishon*, my own way of keeping my sister's work and spirit alive. Within minutes, I put together a list of more than 30 Jerusalemites to invite, enough to stretch the walls of my small living room. Women I'd known since my early days in Jerusalem and women I'd met in the three decades since; women who'd kept me going through the traumas of Diane's illness and women whose hands I'd held through crises of their own. Some of them I spoke with every week, some I barely saw once a year, one was a rare visitor from California. All were my sisters, their lives bound in sorrow and joy to mine.

By the time I went to bed, First Wednesday's other details were in place. It would be on Thursday. (Wednesday night was the eve of Holocaust Day, and Di would have agreed: Thursday night was perfect for First Wednesday.) My friend Judy Labensohn, a marvelous author/teacher, agreed to read an essay she'd written about the death of her own little brother Joey, more than 50 years ago. Bella Savran, my oldest and closest friend in Jerusalem, would of course talk about her favorite nonprofit and mine: the Counseling Center for Women. Back in the 1980s, Bella shared with me her discovery of feminist therapy, and her excitement about it lured me into volunteering for the Center even before it was incorporated as a nonprofit—an activity that granted me the privilege of chairing its board for the next 13 years. When Diane held a First Wednesday in Washington to celebrate my visit there in February 2002, I spoke to her friends about the Counseling Center for Women. Now Bella would close the circle and tell my friends about it.

The evening was going to be okay. On Tuesday, I bought the ingredients for Mom's chocolate chip cake, and scouted Jerusalem for pretty paper plates and cups. Di would have used fine crystal and china, but hey, I brainwaved her, this is Israel. I found paper doilies for the cake and added a kilo of *bourekas* to the menu. It may be a memorial evening, I told Di firmly in my head, but it's Jewish—there'd better be food. On Thursday morning, I set up the refreshment table, the Shabbat *kumkum* (urn) for 40 cups of boiled water, all the chairs we owned and the chairs we borrowed from neighbors. A small, elegant blue glass candleholder perfectly matched the paper plates; I dropped in a white tea light and put it on the table next to a vase of white flowers. Michael, my *ben-zug* (longtime partner), eyed the glass doors to the balcony, wondering whether some people could sit out there.

Our discussions segued to the connections between grieving and writing... and the catharsis of letting it all out in diaries and essays and Internet blogs.

"What about the movie?" he asked. My stomach stabbed me. Secretly I'd been hoping there would be a glitch with the movie. I had watched it being made, a mere four months before Diane died. After a full year in remission—blessed second honeymoon for her and Jim, her husband of just four years—she was again fighting major tumors in her lungs. She was horribly ill, pathetically thin and weak. And eager, as always, to do something for a cause: this time, a short film to promote public participation in cancer clinical trials. The company that produced some of the drugs—still in experimental stages—which had miraculously kept Di alive for two and a half years brought its PR and film crew to her and Jim's door between rounds of chemotherapy. Months later, the disks arrived on my desk in Jerusalem, and there they had remained, unopened, like a letter from the afterworld that I refused to read.

"What about the movie?" Michael repeated, going into techie mode. "We'd better make sure it works." Without asking, he turned on the machine and slipped in the disk. I held my breath. And there, wondrously, was my lovely sister, gracious, smiling, indomitably optimistic in spirit and in her conviction that she could help others win the battle she was fighting. I stuffed my tissues in my pocket and went into the kitchen to bake Mom's chocolate chip cake.

A few hours later, I told my Jerusalem sisters about my one and only sister Diane. The little sister who never seemed to sit still, who was always tugging at my sleeve to persuade me, "Let's *do* something!" Who told me, when she phoned to say she'd been diagnosed with advanced lung cancer, "I'm going to beat it. And I'm going to become the American poster girl for cancer clinical trials." We all looked at the poster that was made a year later to honor her—and to encourage other patients to sign up for clinical trials. We watched the movie in total silence.

And then, as Judy Labensohn read her essay about her little brother, I looked around the room with sudden shock. Thirty smart, creative, successful women—and how many of us had been touched by cancer! At least three in the room—including another Judy, 81 years old—were survivors themselves. Sarah's beautiful 18-year-old daughter had succumbed to leukemia, Evie's husband died of lung cancer in his 40s. Many of our parents, among them my beloved father, were lost to cancer; Bella's dad and Ann's brother were struggling against it at that moment. When Judy finished reading her essay, the discussion segued movingly from the death of siblings to death in Jewish communities, to the connections between grieving and writing and the catharsis of letting it all out in diaries and essays and Internet blogs.

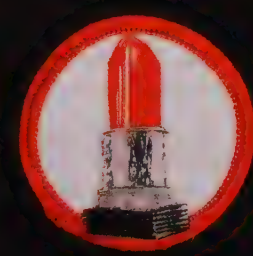
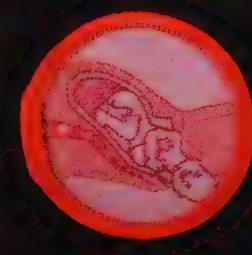
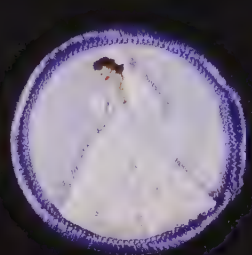
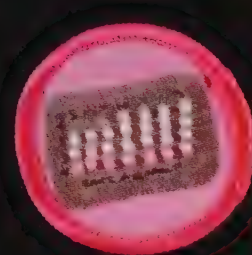
Then it was Bella's turn. I couldn't believe that, in my own turmoil during the past year, I had forgotten so many things I knew so well. That Bella's mother, an Auschwitz survivor, had also died of cancer, when Bella was only 15. That it was in her mother's memory that Bella founded the Freda Halperin Memorial Fund at CCW, to provide low-cost, feminist psychotherapy to women who would not otherwise be able to afford it. My friends, my Jerusalem sisters, talked about the Holocaust, about the strength to survive and the need of survivors—all kinds of survivors—to help others survive, too. They talked about therapy and feminism, about their relations with their own sisters and brothers, and they put their donations for CCW in a big straw hat.

As the guests began to leave, I knew they would be alongside me at future First Wednesdays. Devorah was among the last to go. She stopped at the door and took my hand. "You would have wanted your sister to be here tonight," she said in Hebrew. "She was. *Toda raba*, thank you." ●

Barbara Gingold, one of Lilith's founders, is a writer, photographer and landscape designer in Jerusalem.

FEMALE MERIT BADGES

BY MARY YAEGER



BLACK LACY BRA

B.C. PILLS

BREAST EXAM

HIGH HEEL

BREAST FEEDING

FEMININE PROTECTION

DIAPHRAGM

LIPSTICK

PANTYHOSE

THE BRIDE

CHILDBIRTH

WEIGHT WATCHING

PELVIC EXAM

OVULATING

MASCARA

SHAVING

The Poet

Laurie Suzanne Lessen-Reiche

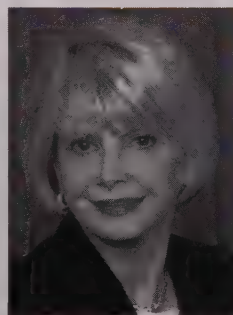
This year's Charlotte Newberger Poetry Competition winner was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1955. She is a widely published poet now living in Northern California. A "serious autodidact," she says it took her many years to find an emotionally safe way to turn her attention to studying the Holocaust. "That safety came with Susan Gubar's important book, *Poetry After Auschwitz—Remembering What One Never Knew*. I began a journey back through and into the Holocaust."



The Prize is Named for

Charlotte Newberger

Charlotte Newberger's support for poetry in *Lilith* magazine has made possible an expanded number of pages for new poems and reviews of poetry, and this—the second annual Charlotte Newberger Poetry Prize. Charlotte has had a longstanding interest in poetry, and the arts in general. In Chicago, she has been a board member at the inception of several theatres, including the St. Nicholas and National Jewish Theatre, where she was president, and she sat for nearly 20 years on the board of the award-winning Steppenwolf Theatre, as well as The Poetry Center. She currently serves as president of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.



The Judge

Myra Sklarew

The judge for the 2006 poetry competition at *Lilith* was Myra Sklarew. She is the author of nine collections of poetry, most recently *Lithuania: New & Selected Poems*, *The Witness Trees*, and *Eating the White Earth* (translated into Hebrew by Moshe Dor) and published in Israel; a collection of short fictions, *Like a Field Riddled by Ants*; a collection of essays, *Over the Rooftops of Time*. Her work has been recorded for the Library of Congress's Contemporary Poets' Archives and has received the National Jewish Book Council Award in Poetry, the Di Castagnola Award, Poetry Society of America (shared with Erica Jong), PEN Syndicated Fiction Awards, Anna Davidson Rosenberg Award from the Judah Magnes Museum. She is the former president of the artist's community Yaddo, and is professor of literature at American University. She is currently at work on a nonfiction study, *Holocaust and the Construction of Memory*, an exploration of Holocaust testimony through the neuroscience of memory.



She says of this year's contestants:

Though I have read a good deal of poetry over the years for contests and through teaching, I was particularly struck by the kinds of people who have submitted to Lilith: daughters of Holocaust survivors, women (and one man, if I recall correctly) from other countries and the United States who are immensely accomplished, those who have lived abroad and worked in other languages. Even if the poems were not chosen for this contest, they were always important in terms of the kinds of experiences and knowledge that they explored and for their craft and language and depth.

I had the feeling that if you put these people around a table, they would have a great deal to contribute (as they already have) and a great deal to share with one another. So I thank you for the opportunity to be in the midst of such kindred spirits.

Abba Kovner Listened

by Laurie Suzanne Lessen-Reiche

"In November 1941 a young girl crawled up over the butchered bodies in the pits at Ponar and made her way eight miles through a frozen forest back to the Vilna ghetto. No one could believe her story—thousands of Jews lined up, shot, and piled in a ditch. But Abba Kovner listened to her."

(from the introduction by Shirley Kaufman to "My Little Sister and Selected Poems" by Abba Kovner)

1.

Chicken Little has come
half frozen, feathers stiff
with the blood of her flock.
Chicken Little has come
but this time
no one believes
the sky
is falling.

2.

Chicken Little trembles, splinters
of fresh bone
on her hands and knees,
the frost of the forest
on her parched tongue,
a silent scream stuck
at the top of her throat.

Who will listen to the little bird?

3.

She says there are beasts in the cities
building
walls, beasts in the woods
tearing down the sky.
I have seen, she says, the world collapse
in a pit of darkness.
I have seen the beast's
red eyes.

4.

One man listens.
Only one man is crazy enough
to listen.

5.

He lifts Chicken Little
in the nests of his hands frightened
by her weightlessness.
He thinks, I am lifting
ashes.
He says, Sister.
And in the cinders
of her eyes
he sees the sky fall.

6.

He says, my love.
He says, daughter.
He says, wife.
He says, you.

7.

He warms Chicken Little,
washes away the blood,
removes what splinters he can.
He builds her a coffin
to carry on his shoulders,
he builds her a coffin
of words and makes himself a coffin
of hope.

8.

Then he carries them both
toward the edge of the earth,
the sky pressing down,
the sky forcing him to his knees
but he never lets go,
never lets Chicken Little go.

9.

He says,
From here you can see the world
of the living.
From here a whole world watches
my face dissolve into blue.

10.

He says,
I believe you.

And with that
they hold back
the sky.

F L I G H T

a short story by Phyllis Carol Agins

Hanina lives in Philadelphia now. Ever since her son decided she couldn't take care of herself anymore and imported her like a jug of olive oil.

"Like a fine old wine," he tells her the one time she complained.

He works for a French drug company that sells homeopathic medicines. Just like the drops and ointments her mother once bought in the Arab quarter all those years ago in Algeria—back when Arabs and Jews believed each other were friends, and before the French created a greater wedge than any differences about Mohamed and Moses.

Hanina counts her 80th birthday in her son's Philadelphia row house. No one speaks to her all day. Her son is working and his children are abandoned in France, along with his ex-wife, who would never add Hanina to her daily obligations, now that the marriage is over. Hanina understands.

Every day she dusts his furniture and folds away his newspaper. Red circles dance across the pages to mark the words he wants to look up.

"I've started a new life here, *Maman*," he says.

Hanina feels too old to start anything new. But here she is, living in a foreign country for the second time in her life, wondering how she got from Constantine to Toulon to Philadelphia all in the space of 80 years when not one of the decisions was hers to make.

Once, she was in charge of the small daily decisions—like what to make for dinner for her husband and son. Or what fruit to buy at the market. Or what route to take home with the day's shopping in a basket looped over her arm. Like a passport to the city around her, that basket opened time so she could disappear for hours. Allowed her to wander to Toulon's port or to the cinema where she'd tuck the basket, filled with onions and apples, under her seat and take in the latest Bridget Bardot film that her husband would never permit. *Indecent*, he'd cry, *not for the eyes of a virtuous woman*.

She remembers all this as she prepares her son's dinner. He makes her life easy, he says, by ordering the groceries delivered to the house each week. Her son won't admit that he still welcomes the Sephardic cooking she's imported with her. He brags about the French food and wine he impresses his clients



with over the long lunches that have added pounds to his lean frame. But Hanina knows not to think out loud. There's always the danger he'll send her back to France to some *maison de retraite* where she'll languish, forgotten. So she remains silent.

The mailman rings the door each day with some package for her son.

"How are you?" she tries, dragging the words from her mouth that could slide easily over French and once even recited poetry in Arabic.

"Good day, Missus," the man replies. Then he adds something about

the weather—too hot, too cold.

"Bad today," Hanina says and points to the sky where the cold rain has formed ice crystals on the man's hat.

She wants to offer him tea like her own mother would have brewed in Constantine—sweet and fragrant with fresh mint. But she's afraid of what her son would say, or more, of what she could say to this man with her bad English.

"Watch television, *Maman*," her son instructs each day. "You'll learn English that way." Before he leaves, he hugs her like the Americans—with a broad clap to her back.

Some nights he takes her out so she doesn't have to cook. From her meticulously organized closet, she pulls a fine silk dress, polka-dotted with lime and tangerine. Her eyes are rimmed lightly with kohl and her lips are glossed peach. Once, even in winter, her skin would have been polished bronze by the Mediterranean sun, but now she rubs rouge onto her pale cheeks. She will not join the other American women in baggy pants and loose shirts.

She sits across from her son in the Italian restaurant. From the kitchen, she can make out some of the Spanish words the dishwashers mix with the empty plates.

"How was your day, *Maman*?" her son asks.

"I watch the stories on television," she answers.

"How many words did you learn today? Remember when you were a little girl, and you learned some English from the Americans who were in Constantine during the war?" He smiles at her as if he's discovered a secret and wants to share it.

"How-do-you-do?" Hanina repeats in English, remembering the Americans who were pleased to still be alive.

She watches the other people eat the Italian food that comes



from the Spanish-speaking kitchen. They eat carefully, balancing their forks in one hand with the other hand quiet in their laps. Like dead birds. Not like Europeans, who use both hands to eat, knife and fork in constant motion, so that each morsel is tasted and enjoyed.

She looks down at her hands resting near the veal Parmesan the waiter has raved about. Oil pockets against the fried meat. She saws away, not even hungry.

In the moment she pauses, she sees the old hands that belong to her now. The veins jump and wobble under the fragile skin. Then she allows herself to examine her wrists. She doesn't think about those two deep lines often, or how they came to be. She can't even see the stitches that once bound them together, even though the black thread had shocked her more than the lines themselves. They are camouflaged by time and age. By all the other cuts on her hands from chopping onions or grating oranges

for a cake. From braiding bread and scrubbing floors. Those two deep lines have almost disappeared.

Her son is watching with a familiar narrowing of his dark eyes. "Maman," he pleads, "there's a cake here, made by a French baker. Let me order it for you—for your pleasure!"

She crosses her wrists in her lap as he calls the waiter to their table.

Hanina is 37 and lives in Toulon now. Her husband is a policeman in this south-of-France port. Her son goes to school with all the French children. Her mother-in-law stays home with her all day while Hanina tries to make a new home in France along with the other refugees from Algeria. There are only two tiny bedrooms in the apartment that is half-buried in the hills above Toulon. Her husband is proud that he can see the

Mediterranean from their apartment—even if only a blue sliver when he thrusts himself from the balcony.

Her mother-in-law is unhappy with everything—even with the larger of the two bedrooms her husband insists they abandon for his mother's comfort. Hanina's son sleeps in the smaller bedroom, which she fills with books and toy cars and French flags. He would prefer tanks like the French recently used against the Algerians, who stubbornly insisted on their own independence. It is 1962, and she and her husband sleep on the pullout couch in the salon. He still wants to make love each night although she is tired, and his mother will surely hear his grunting. She covers his mouth with her hand, but he bites her and then sucks her nipples so hard, she is the one who cries out.

She tries to call the other woman *mother*, as her husband has requested. But the word seems reserved only for her own mother, who died just before Hanina boarded the plane for France and was buried next to Hanina's older brother. *He was simply walking home*, the family sages would recount as if telling a story from the Torah. Killed in an Arab riot because the French *pieu noir* favored Jews over them.

"Weren't we all friends once?" Hanina asked.

Hanina knows her husband has decided.

"You will no longer leave the house without me," he announces one day, as his mother peers from the kitchen. "It isn't safe on the streets. Young women are targets now—the French hate us for coming here."

"But our food?" Hanina manages to ask.

"Mother will go. "She is more clever than you and older. The French will leave her alone."

It takes one week for Hanina to form her escape. She will kiss her son good-bye and tuck a special treat into his pocket for his snack. In the corner of his small room, she hides a note to try to explain. It will make no sense to him now—he's only nine; but later, she believes, he'll come to understand. She will wait until her mother-in-law places the basket over her arm. Hanina will only have a few hours before her son is back for lunch, and her mother-in-law returns from the market. Only a few hours.

She dresses carefully as if she might travel back to Constantine to see her old friends and her lost brother. She smooths her stockings and pins her hat carefully across her brow. She pulls the veil down across her face as she's seen Ingrid Bergman do in the movies. She passes through the bathroom on her way to her mother-in-law's bed.

Hanina doesn't think much before

SHE KNOWS HER MOTHER-IN-LAW COUNTS THE HOURS UNTIL SHE RETURNS AND REPORTS THE MISSING TIME TO HER HUSBAND.

No one would ever say, but Hanina knew that brother had bled to death. His throat slit against the walls of their synagogue, like some lamb in a ritual slaughter, killed on an altar of hatred.

Incomprehensible, that her brother should die so, the one who danced like a Bedouin to Oriental music, who shook his shoulders with pleasure, who played the flute like a street performer, who studied late each night to learn science, who brought her honeyed sweets from the market. Unforgivable, that her mother wailed as she washed his body for burial, not trusting the others to perform this last gift.

Unforgivable.

Hanina escapes from the apartment in Toulon with her basket over her arm. She knows her mother-in-law counts the hours until she returns and reports the missing time to her husband. *What does she do in the street all morning?* her mother-in-law whispers over and over. Each night, her husband climbs onto her to reclaim those lost hours.

He watches her with uneasy eyes. He's a policeman here, just as in Algeria, just like his father before him, and can understand peoples' secrets, he insists one morning before he follows her to the market. Slouching behind a post, he waits as she chooses vegetables and bread that some stranger bakes now. He calculates the minutes she spends watching the sea recoil with the same blue force that once gave her such pleasure on Algeria's coast. He watches until she boards the bus that will take her back to the apartment buried in the hill.

she drags the razor blade across her wrists. The burning of separated skin doesn't surprise her. She remembers how she burned when her son escaped her body. She carefully cuts through

her veins, first one wrist and then the other. The pumping blood doesn't surprise her, either. Hadn't her own brother bled like this on that long-ago night?

She lies against the pillow and places her wrists downward on her mother-in-law's bed. Until she sleeps, Hanina thinks about the sea and Constantine. About her mother who baked each Friday. About her own fingers in that dough, learning to braid it in the ritual way for the Shabbat table. The dough is warm and rises against her hands, just as the blue tide rises against the shore. Hanina floats on a loaf of challah, and cradled against the deep braids, she safely rides the sea. Far away.

She is so far from shore that she can no longer see the hills of Algeria in the distance. He brother calls: *Come, Come*. First from a distance and then in her ear. *Come back*, the voice demands. Hanina turns her head.

"*Maman*, please come back." She hears someone crying.

Then fierce hands hold her wrists in the air as someone binds kitchen towels around them. A body falls across her chest, but it is not her husband on his nightly errands. Her son's chest rises and falls with her own reluctant intake of air. She can hear men cursing because the stairs are too narrow for a litter, and they must carry her down the three flights of stairs that circle the building. She tries not to bleed on them.

After a year in the hospital, the doctors say she can go home. She has told the doctors about her brother and the chalah. About the basket and her mother-in-law. She has finally cried out loud, and, at night, they let her watch old movies. Ingrid Bergman remains beautiful as she boards the plane from Casablanca. To do her duty, Hanina knows.

When she returns home, her mother-in-law has been moved to a daughter's apartment in the next village. Hanina has her own bed in the large bedroom now where her husband holds her in his arms and cries into her nightgown each night.

When she leaves with the basket on her arm, her son begs to come. He grasps her hand as they walk, even though he is 10, and the other boys his age run from their mothers.

Hanina is 13 now and still lives with her parents in Constantine. Her older brother goes to the university each day and brings her a treat from the market when he returns at night. Sometimes it is a book from the antique stalls; one time it was a yellow bird that sang each morning when the swallows began their acrobatics in the sky outside their terrace.

SHE PLAITS THE DOUGH AS IF SHE WERE DRESSING HER OWN BLACK HAIR FOR A FESTIVAL.

She has been bleeding for a year and her mother presented her with a box of chocolates to celebrate the occasion. She and her mother mysteriously cycle together.

"It is God's way," her mother laughs.

So she bathes away the stains of womanhood each month at the same time as her mother. Most of the women are naked in the *hammam*. They are still comfortable with each other, the Jews and the Arabs. Each month her mother chats with the same Arab woman. They talk about their children and laugh behind hands pressed closely to their mouths when they mention their husbands' names. Hanina knows they are sharing women's secrets. Sometimes, she prays the secrets will be hers, too.

Every afternoon she and her friends run through the streets of their quarter. They laugh when they see a group of boys who stand smoking on the corner and choose their sweethearts. The same boy watches Hanina each day with blue eyes that turn away whenever she notices. She knows all about his family because there are few secrets in her quarter. His father is a policeman and his mother was known as a great beauty, and the quarter tingles with the idea that this woman should have made a better match. Some kind of love, the women laugh again.

Some afternoons, Hanina slips away from the knot of friends and wanders the narrow streets until she reaches the Arab market. She is pulled by the scent of flowers and spices. The cinnamon and cumin reach out from their open sacks

where they rest like the pollen of exotic flowers.

I'll travel the world, Hanina thinks. I'll follow the route of spices and silks until I reach their origin—like a great explorer. Maybe I'll go to America.

She has just read about Sir Richard Burton, who obsessively searched for the Nile's source. Beyond the mountains of Constantine, a desert unravels for thousands of miles. She will marry that young man on the corner and have two boys and two girls. But first, she will earn her education. Many Jewish women in Constantine live like the Arab women, inhabiting the world only of their homes—a place bordered by high walls. No matter how sweet the fountain in the courtyard, Hanina will not be captured.

Every Friday, her mother, who doesn't know Hanina's desires for the world, teaches her daughter the skills of maintaining a Jewish home. They prepare the Shabbat meal, the couscous and chicken stewed with prunes and honey. Most importantly, they bake bread together as Hanina's mother teaches her the mysteries of yeast and dough. It is to Hanina's smooth hands that her mother entrusts the braiding of the bread. Hanina is transported by the dough's heat and the smell of fermenting yeast. She carefully sections the three parts and begins to

plait the dough as if she were dressing her own black hair for a festival.

As the bread bakes, Hanina stands on the terrace watching the swallows move across the sky. They soar and

dive, filling the sky as they cry out to each other. The terrace is so high that the swallows fly directly in front of her. She can watch their spiked tail feathers spread while they catch the currents under those angular wings. Hanina knows they have begun to build their nests again. As they have for centuries.

Her mother places the dishes and silver on the table for her to arrange. Before Hanina leaves the terrace, she takes the cotton from her pockets and tosses the pieces, one by one, into the sky, so the birds can bury the soft material in their nests.

The cotton floats in the air for an instant before a swallow swoops down to catch it in its beak. One by one, the squealing swallows dive towards Hanina as she throws the last of the cotton into the air. One last time, the swallows pass in front of her, the cotton trailing behind them like gossamer flags.

Hanina watches with joy as those birds disappear into a flock that soars freely in the direction of the sea. ●

Phyllis Carol Agins is the author of two novels; *Sophie's Name*, a Jewish children's story; and an architectural study of synagogues and churches outside Philadelphia. Her short fiction has appeared in many literary journals. She divides her time between Philadelphia and the south of France.



Jewish Moms, Chinese Daughters

by Merri Rosenberg

"It's just a little hard for me to think of this little China doll taking my mother's name. Your grandmother—this would be hard to explain to her."

from Daniel Goldfarb's 2004 play "Sarah, Sarah"

But it's *not* so hard to explain anymore. It's much like real life. During the past decade, plenty of Jewish grandparents have become familiar with the situation explored in this play, in part about the decision of an older, single Jewish woman to adopt a Chinese baby girl.

Today, "you're shocked when you see an Asian child with an Asian parent," observes Miriam Hipsh about her former neighborhood on New York's Upper West Side. Hipsh is a 59-year-old writer and the founder of a dating web site for the 50-plus set; she adopted her daughter, WuQing, 11 years ago.

Hipsh's experience—and Goldfarb's play—reflect the convergence of two trends: older Jewish women, some of whom have spent decades building up careers, who recognize that they want to experience motherhood, and China's "one child only" social policy, which resulted in the large-scale abandonment of baby girls in orphanages. The resulting phenomenon—of single Jewish women adopting Chinese daughters—has begun to transform the Jewish community. In pre-schools, day schools and after-school religious programs around the country, Asian girls are absorbing Jewish traditions through songs, history lessons and prayers, and learning the davening skills that will enable them to take their place on the bima. And at the same time, their conscientious Jewish mothers, eager to have their daughters embrace both their Jewish and Asian heritage, have enrolled them in Chinese

language classes, or Chinese dance, art and music programs, to develop their girls' diverse identities.

Consider WuQing Hipsh, now 12, who is a product of Manhattan's Stephen Wise synagogue nursery school and pre-K program, as well as a veteran of the Hebrew school at B'nai Jeshurun. (Like most of the Chinese daughters adopted by Jews, WuQing was formally converted to Judaism as a baby.) Since 2003, Hipsh and WuQing have lived in East Hampton, New York, where WuQing (whose Hebrew name, Devorah Sarah, is in memory of Hipsh's late mother, Dorothy), studies Chinese in her middle school and attends Hebrew school locally. She is preparing for her bat mitzvah next year.

"We're at Adas Yisroel, a very small congregation in Sag Harbor, that feels like a community," says Hipsh. "They welcome her. She's much loved by the synagogue. It feels wonderful."

However statistically small this phenomenon of Jewish single mothers with adopted Chinese daughters may be in the greater demographic picture, it has transformed the Jewish communal landscape in ways that weren't even imagined when these founding mothers first ventured to China little more than a decade ago.

Scott Rubin, co-author with Gary Tobin and Diane Tobin of *In Every Tongue: The Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the Jewish People*, says that "Chinese girls are being adopted by single women in the Jewish community partly because women with higher levels of education are having children later, and adoption is the avenue they pursue, and Chinese girls are available for adoption." When asked about whether Chinese girls are viewed as more compliant than boys, or than children of other backgrounds, Rubin notes, "There's an added advantage. We definitely heard the positive stereotype about Asian girls."

Rabbi Cantor (she holds both titles) Angela Warnick Buchdahl, of Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale, New York, is the daughter of a Korean mother and an Ashkenazi Jewish father. She was raised in a Jewish household and believes that "It's different now than when I was a child growing up. It's not as unusual to see children of different races being Jewish."

Still, she notes, "young Asian children look around and don't see Jewish children who look like them. It's still hard. And on an intellectual level, there's the whole question of 'what does it mean to be a Jew?' You're part of a religion, but you're also part of a people, ethnicity or even race. Are we truly an open community, or are we not?"

These questions have begun to intrigue scholars, who are exploring such issues as Jewish identity outside the conventional, Ashkenazic, Euro-centric model.

Patricia Lin is project coordinator for the 2003-2007 study of "Asian American Jewish Experience and Identities" at the University of California/Berkeley and herself a Jew by choice. She says, "There is a struggle within the Jewish community, not just with Asians, to realize the real diversity of the Jewish world."

Adds Buchdahl, "There should be images of non-white

children in our [Jewish] books, in the movie and video images. There's an Ashkenazic assumption that it's the Jewish cultural norm. The Jewish community of North America is not honest about representing the historical diversity of our community. It's a challenge for us. We come from mixed multitudes, who were dispersed in many communities, [yet] the Jewish European community is the only one that's taught. We've all been strengthened and enlivened and made more rich by all that learning."

In their book, Gary and Diane Tobin and Scott Rubin show that American Jews are in fact a multi-racial, diverse community. According to their research, 20 percent of the six million Jews in the United States are non-Caucasian: Asian-American (the adopted Chinese girls are not a statistically significant part of this population), African-American, Latino, Sephardic, Middle Eastern, and mixed-race Jews. Conversion, adoption and intermarriage have all contributed to this redefinition of who "looks" Jewish. Gary Tobin points out in a telephone interview that "the make-up of the Jewish people has always been remarkably diverse. Biblical scholars will tell

*Two phenomena converged:
older Jewish women wanting to
adopt, and China's "one-child"
policy, which left baby girls
abandoned in orphanages.*



us that we were a collection of tribes. Pay attention to the Torah. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob took spouses from someplace else. Moses and David married black women."

When Lee Miller, a New York-based playwright, decided in 2000 to adopt as a single woman, she recalls "I was originally thinking of going to Russia, which was my family background." Perturbed by the health problems of some adopted Russian babies she had read about who had fetal alcohol syndrome or other problems—and plagued by the idea that someday her child might look at her and think "My ancestors killed her ancestors"—she looked elsewhere. Miller says that she found, in contrast, that the Chinese children came from "regular families" and were available for adoption either because their parents were too poor to raise them or because of China's only-one-child policy. Seeing a documentary about orphaned Chinese baby girls, Miller felt that "all these little girls needed help." And so she undertook the journey to find her daughter, Emma Yael, now six.

Miller, who had her daughter converted at B'nai Jeshurun in Manhattan, where her dip in the mikvah was witnessed by Miller's mother and sister, says, "My Orthodox aunt could not have been happier—one more to enter the fold."

What may seem relatively simple when bringing a baby or toddler to a Families with Children from China playgroup takes on other meaning when pre-adolescent girls start to explore their dual identities. Nor is this an entirely uncharted situa-

tion—the experience of an earlier generation of adopted Korean orphans suggests some ways this scenario may play out.

As Dr. Lin has observed in her study participants from across the U.S., Canada and elsewhere, Asian children who have been doted upon by a community when they are young may have quite different experiences as they grow up. “I’ve talked to women—Korean adoptees—who went up to bat mitzvah age in their synagogue, and were shunned once they were in their 20s and 30s. When they leave the community, or are not with their parents, they’re seen as Asian. They’re not being accepted as Jews in Hillel. They’ll walk in with a Caucasian non-Jew, and the non-Jew is thought to be the Jew. The Jewish community is not universally welcoming.”

Recently, some young Chinese girls in the Boston-area Jewish community have been invited to partner with Asian college students at Wellesley College, in a kind of big-sister program. “The adoptees feel this is great,” says Lin.

*Everybody loves a baby...
but what happens when
adolescents who “don’t look
Jewish” start to date?*

Lin underscores the importance of recognizing the centuries-long historical connections between Jews and China to help these families make the connections easier for their daughters. “There were Jews in China a real long time ago,” she explains.

Providing a strong Jewish identity, balanced with an equally respectful nod towards their Chinese heritage, is a major priority for the mothers of these Asian-Jewish daughters.

Judi Sherman of Phoenix, a senior vice-president at Smith Barney, has been clear that her Chinese daughter is going to have a bat mitzvah. Her nine-and-a-half-year-old, Annie Gabrielle LiNa (the last part of her given name is Chinese) “is very much into learning about Judaism,” says Sherman. “She’s never questioned her identity. Out West, the religion seems to be very welcoming. Our rabbi has a sibling who adopted a Chinese daughter.”

Integrating the two traditions has so far not given rise to anything that might shake up the Jewish world. Rabbi Judy Spicehandler, a rabbi-educator at North Shore Congregation Israel in Glencoe, Illinois, says that when her 14-year-old Chinese-Jewish daughter was younger they would decorate their succah with Chinese images, like a dragon. “I did everything—Chinese, Hebrew, English,” says Spicehandler. “I tried to merge the Chinese theme. My daughter was very comfortable with her Jewish identity.” While issues around bat mitzvah are imminent, concerns about dating are farther away—and most of the women interviewed said that they weren’t worrying about that for now.

With a bat mitzvah on the horizon, Hipsh says, “At 13, they choose. She could choose not to be Jewish, but it’s not an issue. She’s a Jewish child in a Jewish family. I don’t know

Chinese-Jewish Children in Interfaith Families

The usual tug of war that occurs in intermarried families about how to raise the children can take on an additional dimension when race is involved, whether the child in question is an adopted Chinese girl, or when one partner is Jewish and the other an Asian non-Jew.

Hoong Yee Lee Krakauer, a Chinese-American woman married to a Jewish man, jokes that her children, 15 and 18 years old, are “idol-worshiping heathen” and “non-discriminatory party animals.” Although Krakauer was raised in the Episcopal church, which had sponsored her Buddhist parents’ emigration from China in the late 1930s, religion hasn’t exerted much of a pull in her household.

“Identity has never been explored through the lens of religion,” she says. “We preserved the spirit of the holidays, like my mother making Harvest Moon cakes with phyllo dough and Skippy peanut butter. Now my daughter, who’s in college, is exploring an identity beyond ‘my mother’s Chinese and my father’s Jewish.’”

Stacey Shub, an Atlanta Jew, and her husband, who is Catholic, have adopted a daughter, Sky, from China. “I was moved a few years ago hearing about the girls being left. Feminism was a piece of it.” So far, Sky is at the Jewish nursery school, but Shub concedes that her husband “wants her to be part of him, and part of me.” She expects that this difference of opinion over Sky’s religious upbringing is not an issue that will be resolved quickly.

For Heidi Gralla, a freelance journalist in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, her marriage to a Chinese-American man has not complicated their children’s upbringing as Reform Jews.

“On my end it’s religious, and for my husband, it’s more cultural,” Gralla explains. Ironically, Gralla is the one who researched Chinese New Year to make the presentations at the children’s schools. Their three children, an eight-year-old daughter and two sons, five and one, “have a clear sense of being Jewish and Chinese,” she says. (“Okay, maybe not the baby.”) “They had their baby namings at Woodlands Community Temple in White Plains and they will be bar and bat mitzvah at Woodlands. My parents still belong to Woodlands.” It’s her family temple, and her community, and a place where her children know they belong.

“So far, we have not blended the two,” says Gralla.

—M.R.

For the Chinese daughters of lesbian moms, the questions may be different.

"My partner and I were together for 12 years before we did this," explains Leslie Kornblum, who lives with Roberta Friedman and their two adopted Chinese daughters in Saratoga, California. Jamie, 7, and Samantha, 5, attend the Cupertino Language Immersion program at the local public school, where their curriculum is taught in both English and Chinese, becoming bi-lingual and bi-literate in the process, says Kornblum. Besides learning Mandarin, they also study traditional Chinese arts, like calligraphy, drama, and dance.

The girls also attend Temple Emanu-El in San Jose.

"On our 18th anniversary, Roberta and I had a celebration at the temple," says Kornblum. "We're one of the few couples who've adopted from China. What keeps being brought up is 'why don't I have a dad?' not about being Chinese in a Caucasian family." Since there are so few Jewish families in their public school, the family seeks Jewish company through their havurah. "Jews are very open to difference," says Kornblum. "The girls went to a Jewish pre-school. They've not had any problems. They've been part of this temple just like any other family. With a bat mitzvah, my only concern is whether it will be too much for them, with English, Hebrew and Chinese." —M.R.

what awaits her. I don't know about her identity search; as yet, there's not the need to deny any part of it. I'm not worried about the dating part. My grandchildren will be Jewish. I made a decision that the more identity I give her, the easier it will be for her." To encourage an identity with her Chinese side, the family is part of a group of other single mothers, some of them Jewish, with Chinese daughters, who frequently get together for Chinese food and other celebrations, Jewish and otherwise.

As 11-year-old WuQing sees it, "When you're adopted, you get to choose whether you're Jewish or not. At my bat-mitzvah, I'm going to say I'm choosing to be Jewish." What she enjoys about her dual heritage is that "You get to celebrate more holidays—like Chinese New Year's, normal New Year's and Jewish New Year's."

Most of these girls are still too young to have had a bat mitzvah. Others are still in the planning stages, with not much thought given to details, except perhaps for including Chinese food in the party menu.

One teenager, who did not want her names used for this article, is at a point where she wants simply to be "another white Jewish girl" and not have to deal with the dual identity she confronts in the larger world. Almost all adoptees wrestle with issues of dual identities, but for children adopted out of

orphanages there can also be a residual "survivor's guilt" about those left behind.

For her traditional bat mitzvah, this girl's *dvar Torah* was about the "Mishpatim" portion, which includes the passage about "not wronging a stranger" or the widows and orphans in the community. She directly addressed the larger social issue of why there are so many adoptees from China, and urged her listeners to take positive action to help these children. She said "These children are like the widows and orphans of the Torah. They are very vulnerable and they need our help. Ignoring them is just as bad as oppressing or wronging them. Some of the children are lucky, and find wonderful homes in other countries with families that adopt them and love them. But we have to help the ones who never have the chance. That is why I will be donating part of my bat mitzvah presents to help children in the orphanages, especially in the Wuhan Foundling Hospital, which is the orphanage that found me my family....Everyone can actively do something to help others, like donate money or clothing or food or time to help people who are less fortunate. If everybody did that, soon there would no longer be any strangers, the whole world would all be one *mishpacha*."

Despite this heartfelt melding of Chinese and Jewish experience, reactions to giving these Chinese girls a Jewish identity are still not always predictable.

"I got a lot of grief for sending her to a Jewish day school from the general Chinese adoption community," says Joan

*Wrestling with her dual identities,
a bat mitzvah girl worries
about her sister-orphans
back in China who
didn't get adopted.*



Story, a clinical social worker in Manhattan with a seven-year-old daughter, Alexa. "They felt she wouldn't be around a lot of other Asians. She would have been in a New York private school anyway, with only a few Asian children in each class. There are some adopted Asian children in her school, just not in her class."

When Story attempted to introduce Alexa to a Chinese dance class, Alexa refused to go back. As Story concedes, "She's very identified with the Jewish community. She told me that 'we can't leave this building. It's special, because this building celebrates Christmas and Hanukkah. Other buildings are just Christian'."

Single mothers aren't the only ones to struggle with these issues.

Randi Rosenkrantz, 55, of Houston, Texas, and her husband, 52, made sure that both of their adopted Chinese daughters, 10-year-old Jill and six-year-old Kate, had Jewish baby naming ceremonies as well as immersion in the mikvah. "I wanted my

Continued on page 33

Modern-Day Sex Slavery

by Ilana Kramer

I came to Israel at the age of 18 to work as a cleaner. They sent me to work in prostitution, 18 hours a day. My quota was 30 clients a day. No fewer. If I accepted even one client less, they beat me, but they beat you so as not to leave any marks, because clients don't like to see a woman with bruises.

—"L.N.," in a hideaway apartment in Israel, giving testimony in "Women as Commodities: Trafficking in Women in Israel 2003," a report by Nomi Levenkron and Yossi Dahan

I imagine that you are a 23-year-old woman in Ukraine, a country worn out by poverty since the fall of the former Soviet Union. Everyone around you is, like you, poor and desperate. There is no food, even for the children. Imagine that five months ago you gave birth. Your husband, who used to bring a little food sometimes, does not come home anymore. The baby cries from hunger, but your milk is all dried up. You have hardly clothes to keep you warm and no relief in sight; it's hopeless.

Then, an acquaintance of your sister's tells you about a job cleaning houses in Israel. Your passport and trip will be paid for, the work will be easy, and you can make 1,000 dollars a month. Before you had the baby, you were making 38 dollars a month. After just one year there, you could come home with enough money to start a new life.

But when you get to Israel, a rough-speaking man confiscates your passport. He says you owe thousands of dollars for your fare and passport, and that you must work—as a prostitute—to pay off the debt. You are made to service 30 men a night; if you resist, you're beaten and raped. You speak no Hebrew or English to run away and ask for help; in any case the man says that he has bribed the police, so don't even try to escape. Worse, he says if you tell anyone, he'll hurt your family at home. He recites your address, the name of the acquaintance who knows your sister, and then he shows you a picture of your baby. You are terrified.

Or this. Imagine that you are a 15-year-old girl looking for a job in your local newspaper in Russia. You spot an ad announcing that waitresses under 25 are needed for restaurants in the U.S. The salaries begin at 1,500 dollars a month. This is perfect, you think. Your family is barely scraping by. If you take this job, you can send money home, and maybe even save some extra for university later. You respond to the ad, no matter the opinion of your family.

But when you arrive at Kennedy Airport in New York, the woman greeting you orders you into a van, and yells *move it*. Confused and suddenly scared, you're brought to a strip club in New Jersey, where you're told you have a huge debt to pay off for the trouble it took to get you here. Other girls hang back in the corners. As you begin to cry, you're swiftly hit in the face by one of the men in charge. The next week you find yourself in the basement of a house in Brooklyn, told you must have sex with 20 or more men every day. If you don't, your debt will get higher, and you will stay longer.

You want to leave this terrible place more than anything in the world. When you open the window of the house, you hear people speaking Russian, and some of the men who come to you for sex are Russian immigrants themselves. Sometimes they speak about friends or their families. One man warns you quietly to be careful of the people who brought you here, and hints that they're connected to local crime mobs. You want to go to someone to make this nightmare stop, but you're scared, and also ashamed. How could you ever even reach out to this Russian community? Maybe they would never believe you, maybe they would shun you, call you a dirty, stupid girl who should have known better.

You may be able to imagine these scenes but, unfortunately, these aren't imaginary stories. Instead, they are commonplace real-life experiences in the underground world of sex trafficking, happening often right around the corner in New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Tel Aviv, in strip clubs, brothels, and private homes. But in the past 24 months, prodded by tougher laws and by a growing public consciousness, there's an attempt to stem this tide, both in the U.S. and Israel.

According to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, the human trafficking industry, a form of modern-day slavery, fuels an estimated \$9.5 billion enterprise world-

The hidden trafficking of women and girls in the U.S. and Israel...
and who is trying to free these captives.



wide each year. The Safe Horizon Anti-Trafficking program estimates two million people are trafficked worldwide annually. While trafficking includes various kinds of labor exploitation, sex slavery is an enterprise where the majority of victims are women and underage girls. Overall, trafficking is the second most profitable industry of organized crime after drug trafficking.

Before passage of the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000, trafficking victims forced into prostitution were often arrested for soliciting sex, then prosecuted as illegal immigrants. Under this Act, sex trafficking is defined as a practice in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion or in which the person induced to perform such acts has not attained 18 years of age.

Although there are no reliable data on the involvement of Jews in sex trafficking—as the female victims, the traffickers, or their “clients”—anecdotal evidence gathered over several months of interviews indicates that Jews are not only on the side of the angels, trying to correct these abuses of human rights, but may also be among the perpetrators as well. Henna White, who works with Russian Jews in New York as the community liaison for the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office, is a part of the Émigré Task Force, a group of Jewish agencies that meet to discuss domestic violence issues. She proposes that this task force take on the issue of trafficking as well.

Several Jewish organizations have been galvanized by the issue, both as a matter of social justice and from a specifically Jewish perspective. Last year, National Council of Jewish Women led a rally outside the United Nations in New York, calling for an end to human trafficking. (NCJW has a long history of protecting young immigrant women from the predations of pimps and evildoers who, a hundred years ago, would meet ships bringing girls and young women to the United States to join their families, and would attempt to lure them into prostitution known then as “white slavery.” NCJW members would meet the boats to try to get to these young Jewish girls and women first.)

A few months after the NCJW rally, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) invited Laura Lederer, Senior Advisor on Trafficking in Persons in the U.S. State Department, to give an overview on trafficking globally. This February, JCPA Plenary adopted a resolution on combating human trafficking. Martin Raffel, Associate Executive Director, told Lilith that part of what motivated the organization’s commitment to human trafficking was the injunction of *pidyon shvuyim*, the rescue of captives. Both the Rambam and the *Shulkhan Arukh* say

that there is no greater mitzvah than *pidyon shvuyim*, for the captive is at once like the hungry, the thirsty, and the naked, and is in mortal danger.

Hebrew Union College in New York entitled a December 2005 symposium on trafficked persons, “Freeing the Captives: The Jewish Response to Human Trafficking.” In response to presentations on the prevalence of this modern-day sex slavery in New York, Rabbi Ruth Gais, Director of the College’s Kollel and Community said, “What struck me was [that] women and girls were living as slaves five minutes from my home.”

One Jewish organization—American Jewish World Service (AJWS)—is taking action directly, working in 37 developing countries with support from Jewish organizations and foundations. From these efforts come programs such as the Cambodia-based COSECAM, which addresses sex exploitation of young women and works to connect them to apprenticeship positions, creating alternative means of income so they’re less vulnerable to the lure of earning money abroad.

Caroline Katz, Director of Immigration Services of the UJA-Federation of New York, explained that 9/11 was the impetus that propelled the organization to take on immigration policies, which eventually led the organization to look at human trafficking. According to Katz, the victims turn up first “most-ly in programs for victims of family violence.”

Critiquing the commitment to fight this sex slavery, Dorchen Leidholdt, Director for the Center for Battered Women’s Legal Service at Sanctuary for Families in New York City, said in an interview, “Somehow it was the Eastern European women who brought attention to this issue. Perhaps the global West identifies with people who look like them...” The idea of white women as premium, luxury merchandise in the sex trafficking industry is not new. In January of 1998, in a *New York Times* special report, Michael Specter wrote that “...Economic hopelessness in the Slavic world has opened what experts call the most lucrative market of all to criminal gangs that have flourished since the fall of Communism: white women with little to sustain them but their dreams. Pimps, law enforcement officials

New Federal Law—Will This Help?

Marina Livshits, clinical coordinator of Kol Isha, a domestic violence program in Boston at Jewish Family and Children Services, works predominantly with Russian-speaking women who come into the U.S. as mail-order brides and often end up being abused by their American husbands. Livshits explains this practice of servile marriage as another form of trafficking, where a woman is recruited through an international bridal agency to be a sexual and domestic slave. Most of Livshits’s clients are Russian women motivated by the idea of marrying a Westerner who promises a good life.

A new federal law that just took effect March 6 requires that mail-order brides brought to the United States be informed both of their immigration rights when they apply for a U.S. visa and also of any criminal history of the husband-to-be. Marriage brokers are under scrutiny as well; they now must screen their clients or be hit with significant fines. “American men don’t need background checks to marry American women, so the law is discriminatory,” Natasha Spivack, owner of Encounters International, in Rockville, Maryland, told Womensenews angrily. Hers is the first U.S.-based marriage-broker agency to be sued by a former client, according to Womensenews.



promises of a nanny job, Tania left her home in Chernobyl to travel to Turkey. In Istanbul, she was sold to a violent pimp. Anya (corn), also a Ukrainian, thought she was travelling to Istanbul to work in a shop. A trafficker quickly sold her into prostitution.

and relief groups all agree that Ukrainian and Russian women are now the most valuable in the trade."

Anita Altman, Deputy Managing Director of Government and External

Relations at UJA- Federation of New York, asks, "What were we told at Passover each year? That we were once slaves. If not us, who? Jews are told *Zachor*, remember. We must not be a community that's so insular that we look out only for our own."

But in some cases, it is "our own" who *are* the parties involved, particularly as "clients" (we should more aptly term them "abusers") of these sex slaves in Israel.

Bonna Haberman, a lecturer in Gender and Judaic Studies at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, explained the role of the U.S. in the bringing trafficking to the fore as an urgent issue in Israel. In 2000, the U.S. created a three-tier monitoring system to identify which countries meet the minimum anti-trafficking standard, attaching sanctions to "Tier 3" nations who do not fulfill it. "When Israel came up in the third tier, then it really lit a fire under the administration of Israel."

"Not only did the publication of the U.S. report result in great embarrassment," reported Nomi Levenkron, author of a 2003 Israeli report on sex trafficking, "it also constituted a very real threat, since U.S. legislation prohibits the provision of non-humanitarian economic aid to countries in category three." Levenkron is the head of the Legal Department at the Hotline for Migrant Workers and directs the legal clinic for trafficking at Hebrew University.

Israel's Parliamentary Enquiry Committee on the Trafficking of Women, led by Zahava Gal-On, published findings

early in 2006 which illustrate the enormity of the problem in Israel. The committee assessed trafficking in that country from 2000 to 2005 and found that between 3,000 and 5,000 women are smuggled into Israel each year for the purposes of sex trafficking, most of them women from the former Soviet Union. Each woman is traded for about \$8,000 to \$10,000 U.S. dollars. Annually, the take is over one billion dollars in Israel.

Levenkron's report stated that of the large sample of trafficked women interviewed, 44% said that the men who came to them for sex were a part of the Israeli police force. When Lilith asked Levenkron to explain, she responded that she believed there was a great deal of complicity with trafficking on the part of legal authorities worldwide. She told of police authorities returning escaped victims to brothel owners. Levenkron also described the anger of the public when the police involvement as clients was revealed. "They called us crazy feminist bitches after we published about this." In response to the *why?* of trafficking, Levenkron was clear: "There is this thinking that 'I deserve it, I am the best...she's only a Russian prostitute.' You have to give women some rights, besides just using them for testimonies and sending them home. They have trauma I cannot even start to describe."

At a UJA Forum on Trafficking in February, women joined together from a range of organizations—among them Jewish Women International, FEGS, New York Association for New Americans (NYANA), The Jewish Board of Children and Family Services and Safe Horizon—Altman, who had founded the UJA-Federation Task Force on Family Violence in New York, stressed the urgency of lobbying for state laws to prosecute trafficking specifically. Right now, they only address specific crimes such as rape, physical assault, homicide. New York, for example, has no state laws against trafficking itself, and most charges are brought at the state level. And there is not even one shelter in the U.S. for victims of sex trafficking.

Cate Griebel, an intensive case manager with the Safe Horizon Anti-Trafficking Program, commented that "the Jewish community has the unique ability to become involved with anti-trafficking efforts both on local and national policy levels and through direct services to trafficking survivors." Such direct service includes assistance to victims who not only experience

Pimps, law enforcement and relief groups all agree that Russian and Ukrainian women are now the most valuable in the trade.

language barriers in communicating with those trying to assist them, but are also, understandably, fearful and distrustful in the aftermath of their trauma. Griebel explained that she recently met with staff of the Jewish Board of Family and Children Services working in the Russian-speaking sections of Brooklyn, New York. "I'd say we have seen an increase in the number of Russian clients over the past year. The Jewish Board has important inroads to the Russian-speaking population in New York City; they understand the dynamics of trauma and they are seen in the community as professionals, especially regarding issues of confidentiality. This is very important." Safe Horizon's program does not screen for religious background, so Griebel had

no comment on the exact percentage of these Russian-speaking victims who might be Jewish.

A gutsy Jewish Canadian filmmaker, Ric Esther Bienstock, has more to say on the possible role Jews play in trafficking. Bienstock was struck by the subject of trafficking when she met two Russian women working as slaves in a brothel in China three years ago. The result is the brave and scathing documentary *Sex Slaves*, a "Frontline" investigation that aired on PBS in February. Bienstock took to the streets in Moldova and Ukraine and filmed with hidden cameras actual scenes of women being sold. While Bienstock did not work directly with Jews, she suggests that they may be involved. She told Lilith by email that "While filming 'Sex Slaves' we didn't come across any Jewish traffickers or victims, but that's not to say that they don't exist. It is common knowledge that there are Jews involved in the Russian mafia, which is undoubtedly involved in the trafficking of women to Europe and inevitably, to North America. [Since the broadcast] I have received emails from several people criticizing me for not discussing the Jewish involvement in trafficking."



Katerina (top) was taken to Istanbul's Aksaray district and sold after being promised a legitimate job in Turkey. Katya (bottom), from Moldova, travelled with a male acquaintance from Odessa to Istanbul, where he sold her.

"We Were Slaves..."

Forced trafficking and prostitution are part of a seldom-told history of Jewish women. **Isabel Vincent**, author of *Bodies and Souls: The Tragic Plight of Three Jewish Women Forced Into Prostitution in the Americas* (Random House, 2006) tells not only of these three women, but of an entire phenomenon of thousands of Eastern European young Jewish women who fled a rising climate of anti-Semitism and the bleak realities of their shtetls and ghettos, from the 1860s to the beginning of World War II. They left with the prospect of work opportunities abroad only to be sold into forced slavery and prostitution by the Zwi Migdal, an organized group of Jewish mobsters, in the brothels of South America, India, South Africa, and New York. They were then, like so many victims of trafficking today, shunned by their own people. In America, these Jewish women were forbidden to enter the synagogues of the surrounding, reputable Jewish communities. These communities viewed their fellow sisters as uncouth, foul women.

Bonna Haberman in Israel speaks to this history, referring back to the happy-shtetl imagery of such icons as "Fiddler on the Roof": "It was a very dark side of Tevye."

An American Jewish woman who works closely with Russian-Jewish populations in New York (and who requested anonymity to protect those she serves) said that she believes Russian-Jewish women are indeed being sold into sex slavery and brought into the U.S., but do not come forward for help out of shame, fear of the traffickers, and a fear of local police authority based on experiences in their home countries. This source noted that 15 years ago, domestic violence was not spoken about in the Jewish community at all, and suggested that trafficking of girls and women for sex slavery would in the future similarly become more publicly acknowledged in the Jewish community. She noted that the profile of many of Jewish women trying to leave Eastern Europe for the U.S. is the same as that of their non-Jewish cohort: they come from poverty, they are from a place they want to get out of in

Russia, they need to make money in the U.S. to survive. Meanwhile, any Jewish victims, like most of their sisters, remain silenced.

"Certainly if women have another alternative economically," says Leidholdt of Battered Women's Legal Services, "it would help the situation tremendously. We have to look at how we can provide women and girls with meaningful alternatives. We need to look at who is being prostituted and who is benefiting from this." Filmmaker Bienstock says, in the director's note accompanying "Sex Slaves," that "the collapse of the Soviet Union has resulted in a desperation that has forced thousands of young women to do anything to get out and try to earn a living. This is the root cause of the increase in women from these countries into the global sex trade." Bienstock exposed this cruelty in her "Frontline" interview: "There are no happy endings in the world of trafficking. There are women who get saved who might be helped...and get back on their feet, but these people are scarred for life."

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To help a trafficking victim, call the Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline at (888) 373-7888, the Trafficking in Persons and Worker Exploitation Taskforce Hotline at (888) 428-7581, or call 911 for immediate assistance.

Jewish Moms, Chinese Daughters

Continued from page 27

children to be well-grounded, and in a Caucasian family where they do not look like us, I needed and wanted to find a way. So I decided that through our religion they would hopefully feel more of a connection," she explains in an e-mail message. "They will both have a bat mitzvah."

Rosenkrantz is making an effort to ensure that her daughters

The Chinese adoption community frowns on Jewish day schools. "They felt she wouldn't be around a lot of other Asians."

are linked to their Chinese heritage as well. "We stay connected to other families who have adopted from China," she says. "We have Asian influences in our home, especially artwork. I have a book collection myself that the kids will share as they get older, that have to do with China and/or Chinese adoption. I bought books for the kids on China that were age appropriate. We celebrate Chinese New Year."

With her husband, Lisa Gibbs is raising two daughters, 10 and five, both adopted from China. Uncomfortable with the egalitarian Conservative synagogue they initially belonged to in Brooklyn, Gibbs—who attended yeshiva until eighth grade—switched her daughters to a Jewish cultural program. Gibbs reports in an e-mail, "While I am somewhat sad that [her daughter Basya] will have a less traditional Jewish upbringing, I like the program there far more in terms of Jewish

ethics, and I notice that they are doing far more in the area of Jewish identity....She has even decided that she likes learning Yiddish—and this is after refusing to learn Chinese, and hating Hebrew at Hebrew school and Spanish in public school! Somehow this school has made learning Yiddish a positive to her!"

Gibbs adds, "I want them to feel REALLY Jewish and REALLY Chinese, not some watered-down version." Her five-year-old, Mira, takes Chinese dance class and watches Chinese language and song tapes.

For other parents whose adopted Chinese daughters are still quite young, there is an almost touching faith that by the time their girls are older there will be no doubt about their place in the Jewish community.

Debbie Halperin, living in Suffern, New York, has a three-year-old daughter from China, and an 11-year-old daughter from her first marriage. "The little one goes to synagogue for nursery school," she says. "Laci loves being Jewish. She loves Hanukkah, she knows the prayers for Shabbat. She's a Jewish girl through and through. She's part of the Jewish family. She'll have a bat mitzvah and be married under a huppah." Halperin, 42, is a founding member of a Jewish/Asian adoption group that recently celebrated its third Hanukkah party.

Ultimately, of course, little matters other than the bonds that have formed between mother and daughter.

"She's been enriched by the Jewish element, and I've been enriched by the Chinese element," notes Hipsh. "It's all good."

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That Organ-Donation Card...

Continued from page 48

Women donors are far outnumbered by men. According to OPTN, there have been 39,218 organ donations by women since 1988—less than half of the 97,679 total donations. In fact, in almost every year for which data exists, the number of men donating exceeds the number of women by over a thousand. Womanshealth.gov makes clear that "finding organ donors can be challenging for minority women," specifically because an organ match is much more likely to work if both donor and recipient are of similar ancestry. Furthermore, size does matter, so it's more likely that a woman in need of a donated organ will find a match from another woman. The simple facts that govern organ transplants mean that Jewish women will most likely match with Jewish women. So: Want to save a Jewish woman's life? Sign the forms—in some

states they come with your driver's license—to become an organ donor.

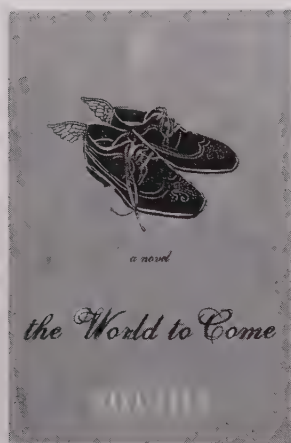
It's clear to me now that all Jews should feel obligated (in fact, *are* obligated) to donate organs at death. Feminist Jews have been revolutionary in advocating women's control over our own bodies. Now, in ways most of us have probably never considered before, we have a chance to use our bodies for the good of someone else after we have no more use for them.

Melanie Weiss is a graduating senior at Sarah Lawrence College. She can be reached at melanieaweiss@gmail.com.

For more information, go to: organdonor.gov, optn.org and womenshealth.gov.

The World, To Come

Dara Horn talks with Merri Rosenberg about lies, betrayal, and her new novel.



What drove you to make Marc Chagall so central to *The World to Come*?

The book is about the theft of a Chagall painting from a museum during a singles' cocktail hour; it really happened at a temporary exhibit at the Jewish Museum in New York. In the same exhibit, there were some illustrations Chagall had done for a children's book by Der Nister, who is one of my favorite Yiddish authors. I realized that Chagall had illustrated books for many of my favorite writers, and I began wondering how he had known them. I discovered that one of Chagall's first jobs when he was a young man was as an art teacher in an orphanage in Russia for Jewish boys who had been orphaned by the pogroms—and Der Nister had been one of his housemates in faculty housing there, as had several other Yiddish writers.

It eventually dawned on me that Chagall was nearly the only person in this circle of artists to die a natural death; almost all of the others (including Der Nister) were murdered in various ways under the Stalinist regime. Chagall was atypical of this circle in that his work was not tied to a language that needed translation, and he became famous because of his work's potential for universalism. The others all made the choice to commit themselves to Jewish life in the Soviet Union, and they paid for that choice with their

lives. Yet it is Chagall whose works are so often used as a shorthand for a "lost world," while the Yiddish writers' works are almost entirely forgotten. The discrepancy disturbed me so much that I wanted to explore it.

You're a Ph.D. candidate at Harvard. How did you get so interested in Yiddish?

I am a fourth-generation American. I learned Yiddish in college. Learning Yiddish opened an entire world to me, one so vast and luminous that I can't believe how few people know about it.

My doctorate is about the idea of morality as a motivator of plot in works of fiction, using texts from Hebrew and Yiddish litera-

Chagall was the only one of his circle who was not murdered.

ture as case studies. And of course Yiddish literature plays an enormous role in my novel. One of the authors in my dissertation, Der Nister, is also a character in the novel. And I translated many works of Yiddish literature and incorporated them into the novel—most of them are taken directly from the syllabus of a Yiddish literature course I taught, which is also not a coincidence.

And I imagine it is also not a coincidence that the titles of both of your novels come from important ideas in Judaism.

Literature in Jewish languages has almost always been built on a kind of layering of texts. In languages like Hebrew and Yiddish, even secular literature often has references to ancient religious works built into it. I wanted to try to bring this possibility into English literature, and the titles are just one example of that. *In the Image* is from Genesis, where we are told that man is made in the image of God, but the main character in that novel is a person who has a massive slide collection he has assembled from his travels around the world, and the title suggests that one of the ways in which we



resemble the divine image is in our eagerness to preserve what we know we cannot keep forever. *The World to Come* is a phrase that means several things too. In Judaism it refers to an age of redemption, which is often conflated with life after death. But of course it also literally just means the future—this world, to come. In the novel, there is an implication that these meanings might be more similar to each other than we think.

In *The World to Come*, the characters struggle again and again with authenticity in life and in art. Why does this matter so much?

Forgeries of all kinds come up frequently in the book—art forgery, plagiarism of literary works, and so on—with a disturbing lack of consequences. I think that when something is nearly forgotten—whether a person, a historical moment, or a work of art—there is often free reign to distort and abuse its memory, and I wanted to explore the implications of those distortions.

But there is a deeper human element to the forgeries in the book too, which connects them to a larger question that the book explores: trust and betrayal. Over and over in this novel, people are betrayed by those they trust. I was interested in the idea of betrayal (in forgeries of all kinds, whether artistic or emotional) because of the goodness and faith it requires on the part of the victim: it's a situation where kindness and generosity are actually what make aggression or exploitation possible, and I was curious about the ethical implications of that. When is kindness really kindness, and when is it dangerous naïveté? How do we weigh our eagerness to trust the world against its eagerness to deceive or destroy us? These are questions for everyone, but of course they have a particular resonance in Jewish history.

Does a novelist have an obligation to be faithful to history?

I do think it is important to be faithful to history, even when writing fiction. Even though fiction is “made up,” we all

consider it important that it be “emotionally true”—that is, that the emotions the characters experience are plausible and convincing. And that just isn't possible in historical fiction when the historical context is inaccurate. Imagine that two centuries from now, a renowned writer decides to write a historical novel about the boom years of the turn of our current century. Let's say it's a novel set on Wall Street, a social satire about big money and dot-com frenzy and rampant materialistic glee, where all the characters are carefree and profligate, and all the action takes

**When is kindness
really kindness,
and when is it
dangerous naïveté?**

place in New York's financial district. Now imagine that the novel's action takes place in October of 2001. It is impossible for such a novel to be “emotionally truthful” when the author ignores the historical reality of the time—and in fact such a novel would be insulting to those who really suffered through the events of that autumn. This example may seem extreme, but I've read many novels about blissful life in European shtetls in the 1920s and early '30s, nearly all of which ignore the historical fact that shtetl life had been totally decimated by World War One and the Russian-Polish War of 1919. I don't think you can have “emotional truth” without real truth. People don't live in bubbles, and they didn't live in bubbles in the past either.

I think that the way we choose to remember the past affects the way we live our own lives, what we value and what we decide is worth saving. History is a sequence or a web of events, but a sequence of events alone is not a story. What makes something a story is the set of values that the storyteller uses to draw connections between events. To me, that is the exciting part of historical fiction: the ability to imagine what is obscured

from us in real life, which is how the past causes the future.

This book focuses on past and future generations, on orphaned children and the absence—and presence—of parents. In the acknowledgements, you credit your own parents very graciously.

Parents and children are our world's only evidence that there is life after death. In the novel, there's a point where a child asks her mother whether she believes in reincarnation. The mother says she doesn't, but offers another possibility of an afterlife: she tells her daughter that those who have died are in the same place as those who haven't yet been born, and each person's task after death is to choose the traits assigned to their descendants. That may seem like some kind of bizarre fantasy, but it's also the reality of genetics: our ancestors' dry bones live forever within us. And aside from genetics, it is also the reality of learning, as parents make choices about what aspects of their own lives they wish to give to their children—and it's those choices that fascinate me.

You've just recently become a mother yourself. Did this affect the novel?

There is an important part of *The World to Come* which is about a baby (or more accurately, a soul) before its own birth. It's true that my first child was born a few months ago, but the publishing industry moves on a geologic time scale, and when I was writing this book I wasn't even thinking about becoming pregnant. But my sister was pregnant with her first child, and I began thinking about the legend in the Talmud in which each person is taught all the secrets of the Torah before birth, only to be forced to forget it all upon being born. In the novel there is a scene in this world before birth where everyone is studying these secrets. Of course, once the baby was born, I realized that the secrets that babies have really forgotten are just the secrets of how to sleep through the night!

Moscow, Vietnam, New Jersey

Never mind that **Dara Horn**, author of *The World to Come* (Norton, \$24.95), is a Harvard doctoral candidate pursuing comparative literature studies in Yiddish and Hebrew literature. Above all else, Horn is a consummate story teller whose imagination and narrative skill succeed in bringing to vivid life the worlds of 1980s suburban New Jersey, present-day New York, and Soviet Russia of the 1920s and 30s. Linked by the theft of a Marc Chagall painting, which the protagonist, Benjamin Ziskind, believes to be his family's rightful possession, Horn weaves the Ziskind saga into the lives of Chagall and the Yiddish writer known as "Der Nister" (The Hidden One) to conjure a universe of extraordinary connections

Nearly all the characters in this seductively compelling novel are lost souls who are damaged in some way. Ben, a divorced writer for a television quiz show, is a former child prodigy who, as an adolescent, had to wear a brace to correct his spine. Unsure of himself and nearly paralyzed by inertia, Ben worries that he is "still waiting for a future that might never arrive." He and his twin sister Sara are recently orphaned as the novel opens, as are many of the novel's characters. Erica Frank, the assistant curator at the museum where the Chagall is stolen who piques Ben's emotional and romantic interest, has also lost her mother. And Boris Kulbak, who is the reason the Ziskinds owned the painting in the first place, was once Chagall's student in a Soviet orphanage for the children of those who perished in Stalin's pogroms.

Dara Horn, whose previous novel, *In the Image*, received much critical praise, has written an astonishingly rich second novel, one that encompasses the Jewish world of the Old Country as well as the New, with an imaginative detour to Paradise. She brings her literary skill to bear on an almost unbearably mimetic description of an ambush in Vietnam, where Sara and Ben's father, Daniel, loses his leg when he falls into a Vietcong "tiger trap." A similar sensibility allows Horn to convey that same sense of immediacy and detail in settings such as a Moscow apartment building during the Cold War, where neighbors and friends betray one another; the suffocating landscape of 1950s suburbia; or even the surprisingly familiar environment that is the world to come.

Part mystery and part meditation on history, theology, philosophy and folklore, this novel is a lyrical and haunting exploration of family, love, and loss. "The loved already-weres and the not-yets of our world, the mortals and the natals, are bound together somewhere just past where we can see, in a knot of eternal life."

Is the "world to come" indeed the stuff of legend, the realm where the righteous are rewarded and the not-yet-born experience a taste for the paradise that will drive their mortal existence? Or is it, as Ben's deceased mother Rosalie suggests—with that significant comma punctuating the phrase, "the world, to come"? Perhaps Ben is right when he considers that "the world to come that his parents had always talked about was not an afterlife at all, but simply this world to come—the future world, your own future, that you were creating for yourself with every choice you made in it."

—Merri Rosenberg

Our Reviewers

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Laura Levitt, Director of Jewish Studies and associate professor of Religion at Temple University, is the author of *Jews and Feminism: The Ambivalent Search for Home*.

Julia Wolf Mazow edited *The Woman Who Lost Her Names* and teaches adult education courses on Jewish women writers in Houston.

Faye Moskowitz is a professor and chair of the English Department at George Washington University. She has written four books and edited *Her Face in the Mirror: Jewish Women on Mothers and Daughters*.

Hannah S. Pressman is a doctoral candidate in modern Hebrew literature at New York University.

Merri Rosenberg's writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Jewish Week* and other national publications.

Rebecca Schwartz is editor of *All the Women Followed Her: A Collection of Writings on Miriam the Prophet and the Women of Exodus*. She works for the Union for Reform Judaism's Department of Family Concerns.

Gillian Steinberg is assistant professor of English at Yeshiva College of Yeshiva University. She is currently working on a book about Philip Larkin's verse.

A Biblical Bloomsbury

I must purify myself," declares the tortured painter Beatrice Campbell-Bennett, the protagonist of *Mandrakes from the Holy Land* (Toby Press, \$22.95). Set in Ottoman-controlled Palestine in 1906, this romantic epistolary novel about a woman's battle with faith and sexuality plays with the polarities between Judaism and Christianity, corruption and chastity, nature and society, body and mind. Thanks to Sondra Silverston's fluid rendering of **Aharon Megged's** 1998 novel *Duda'im min ha-Aretz ha-Kedoshah*, English-reading fans of Hebrew literature now have access to this provocative portrait. Through Beatrice's wide-open eyes, we encounter Palestine in the first decade of the twentieth century, meeting such famous historical figures as the Aaronsohn family of Zikhron Ya'akov along the way.

The purpose of Beatrice's journey to Palestine is ostensibly to find and paint the mandrake, the famous aphrodisiacal flower at the center of the Biblical dispute between the jealous sisters Leah and Rachel. As we accompany Beatrice on her horseback trek around the country, it becomes increasingly clear that she has actually fled England in order to escape her overwhelming sexual attraction to Vanessa Stephen, sister of Virginia Woolf. Megged casts Beatrice as a member of

Woolf's exclusive Bloomsbury group, and the gatherings of this London avant-garde flicker in the background and contrast starkly with the rustic and often brutal surroundings Beatrice encounters in her travels. This brutality culminates in two rapes, by her Arab guide and a Russian Jewish immigrant, which are the source of her mental deterioration. Towards the novel's end, Beatrice calls Palestine "mad" and a "male, violent country." Her initial idealization of the Holy Land as "the source of purity" has given way to her recognition of its culpability in her defilement.

Part travelogue, part Christian confession, part psychoanalytic case study, *Mandrakes* is initially striking because of its unusual form. We learn Beatrice's story from text that is assembled by one Dr. P. D. Morrison, who has been dispatched from England to Palestine by Beatrice's family to treat her apparent madness. Letters from Beatrice to Vanessa are arranged in chronological order and interspersed with Beatrice's journal entries, stolen by Dr. Morrison. The psychologist's commentaries (ranging from pompous ruminations to absurd accusations of "theopathic hysteria") appear periodically in footnotes at the bottom of the page. The resulting stitched-together narrative often functions like a mystery novel: since we are told from the start that Beatrice has lost her mind, we search for clues as to how and why this has happened.

Like *Foiglmán*, Megged's 1987 novel about a Yiddish poet's entanglement with an Israeli historian, *Mandrakes from the Holy Land* is a tale of obsession. With its dramatic plot about the violation of an English woman traveling in the East and its use of the name Aziz, *Mandrakes* also evokes *A Passage to India* by E.M. Forster, another associate of the Bloomsbury group. Whether Megged is deliberately parodying or simply referencing the conventions of the colonial novel is debatable, but *Mandrakes* betrays an unmistakable urge to explore the religious and cultural tropes that Western culture imposed upon the East. Everything Beatrice sees is "so biblical," from luscious vineyards to a veiled woman who looks "like Rebecca astride a camel on her way from Haran to Canaan." Beatrice classifies the people she sees according to biblical chapter and verse, just as she categorizes the flowers she collects on her journey. The great achievement of Megged's novel is to expose this mindset while extending sympathy to his suffering

protagonist, bringing the harsh sunlight of his writing to bear upon the assumption that finding a solution to mutual mistrust and brutality between peoples will be as easy as finding a biblical love-flower in the holy land.

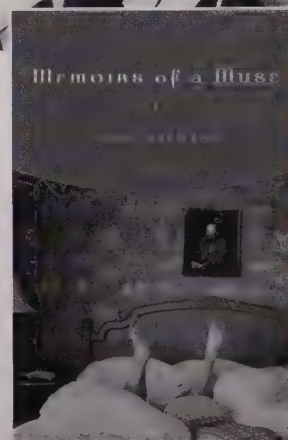
—Hannah S. Pressman

Dostoevsky in Brighton Beach

With *Memoirs of a Muse* (Pantheon, \$22.95), debut novelist **Lara Vapnyar** gives us the smart, charming account of Tanya, a young Soviet émigré who is determined to inspire a great man. Meeting Mark, a celebrated New York writer, should set destiny in motion—but Tanya's Marxist education has not prepared her for the neuroses of a thoroughly (and hilariously) stereotypical Upper West Side Jewish artist. Long before Tanya's command of English allows her to read Mark's books, she has been incorporated into his regime of vitamins, therapy, and jogging. As she acclimates to an American lifestyle, Tanya questions why Mark cares so much about his physical and mental health—would Dostoevsky jog, gulp protein smoothies, or summon a shrink to relieve him of his sadness?

In this highly literary milieu, Tanya reads herself and Mark against Dostoevsky and his lovers. Simultaneously, Vapnyar vividly portrays an Eastern European's culture shock at encountering twenty-first-century America. A recent immigrant herself, Vapnyar's descriptions of disconnect are sharp: Brighton Beach's Russian community preaches its brand of cultural immersion, featuring American clothes, half-price opera tickets, and computer-programming classes. Meanwhile, Tanya longs for distractions from this "jittery and ferocious" pursuit of the Ultimate American Dream. Vapnyar culls a layered tale of perceived destiny from an otherwise straightforward account of coming to America and beginning a love affair.

A perfect sarcastic edge emerges at just the right moments: introducing the muse motif, Vapnyar tells a story about Dostoevsky's future lover Polina and her sister as children. A nursery governess peers into their coffee grounds to predict the girls' futures in a dark, dated scene. Tanya's crisp, modern voice then snaps the reader from the nineteenth century, noting that she had made up the anecdote.



Lara Vapnyar's 2003 short story collection, *There Are Jews in My House*, was highly-acclaimed for its treatment of the lives of newcomers. This newest offering cements her status.

—Liz Kilstein

Never at Home

A *Good Place for the Night* (Persea, \$14.00), the latest collection of stories by acclaimed Israeli author **Savyon Liebrecht**, explores the meaning of place for Israelis living both at home and abroad in an age of airplanes, cell phones, and atomic bombs. In "Munich," an Israeli journalist covering the trial of a Nazi war criminal eats dinner in a cheap Muslim-owned Middle Eastern restaurant in Munich, where he sees, on television, a German volunteer in a Jerusalem hospital treating Israelis who have been injured in a suicide bombing carried out by a Muslim. The violence back home hits even closer when the restaurant becomes the target of neo-Nazi rage and the journalist, like all of Liebrecht's protagonists, realizes that he can no longer feel at home. Several of these stories end with an unexpected O. Henry-esque revelation that casts their characters in a startling new light. In "Kibbutz," for instance, a young Israeli man returns to the kibbutz where he was raised to force the woman who nurtured and mentored him to confront a terrible truth—a truth that only becomes clear to the reader in the story's final pages.

The crowning capital of this collection is "Jerusalem," in which Idit, the heroine of an earlier story, is driving back from the airport in a rental car after nine years spent working as an architect in Hiroshima. As Idit anticipates her reunion with her lover, who whispers sweet nothings into her cell phone, Liebrecht juxtaposes Idit's return journey with italicized accounts of an ancient Jewish woman's ascent to the Temple to pray for a child on the eve of the Roman siege of Jerusalem. Suddenly, Idit realizes that she must pull over to the roadside: "Idit's eyes were drawn to the nice little jug of oil, a childish paper cut-out blazing on the car's dashboard. It evoked a memory of her class decorations committee meeting before Hanukkah, and of the smell of cut crepe paper and glue mixed with the thick, tempting aroma of steamy donuts...She suddenly remembered that it was dangerous to keep driving when the oil indicator was on, and she cried out in alarm,

"Something's wrong with the car!"" An army van pulls over beside her, and Idit is terrified to find that instead of the IDF soldier she expects, a Palestinian in civilian clothes comes walking towards her vehicle with a "metallic light, like a hidden blade, glittering momentarily in his hand." At that moment, Idit's story is thrown into historical relief as the story flashes back to the Jewish woman of antiquity who stands watching the Temple burn, "the light of the flames...tearing the heavens like swords of fire." The ancient woman feels a palpable connection to her home even as it is consumed by flames before her eyes, whereas Idit, who is returning to that same home, finds herself suddenly alienated from it. Here Liebrecht masterfully interweaves emotional and historical realities to show just how high the stakes have always been in a city that is the locus of so much longing.

A Good Place for the Night closes with the title story about a post-apocalyptic world in which only five people—an Israeli woman, an American man, a small boy, a nun, and an itinerant Pole—have survived a sudden nuclear catastrophe. The Israeli woman, Gila, is haunted by nightmares about deformity and destruction: "She woke up at night in a bloodbath, her two girls had drowned right before her eyes and she herself, handless, had tried to get them out by pushing and poking at them with her head, then had dived in after them, kicking her feet to raise them up, but they sank into the dark water... and she watched with desperate eyes as their hips, their shoulders, their faces, the ribbons in their long hair vanished." Here, too, Liebrecht dramatizes the sense of fear and unsettledness that may be, in her eyes, a necessary feature of the identity of every Israeli, regardless of how close to home they find themselves.

—Ilana Kurshan

Rashi's Daughters Live

Rashi's *Daughters* and *My Guardian Angel* both explore the little-known lives of the daughters of Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, the famous Torah scholar and commentator known today as Rashi. The first, *Rashi's Daughters* (Banot Press, 2005, \$15.95), is a labor of love by new author **Maggie Anton**. Anton brings the world of medieval French Jewry to life, touching upon everything from parchment-making



Kibbutz
revelations
straight out of
O. Henry.

and Talmudic discourse to midwifery and grape harvests.

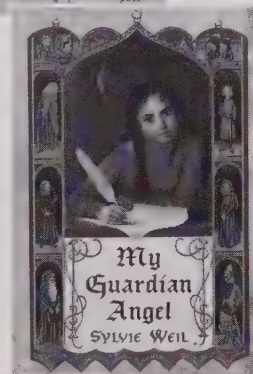
She relates that Rashi's three daughters, Joheved, Miriam and Rachel, studied at their father's knee and became highly learned. These women really existed, and although we know little more about them than their names and the fact that they studied in their father's yeshiva, Anton creates characters who engage us with their ideas and their struggles. In the tradition of Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*, this is historical fiction that brings our heritage as Jewish women closer to home. Rashi himself, one of the greatest Jewish scholars of all time, leaps off the margins of the Talmud page to take shape as son, husband, father and grandfather.

With a compelling combination of drama, suspense, and romance, Anton takes her readers on a journey to Troyes, France, during the eleventh century. While the frequent references to ghosts, amulets and magic potions remind us that we're in the medieval world, the characters also experience timeless concerns: pre-wedding jitters, a grandmother's dementia,

the problems of religious coexistence, and the struggle to balance individual goals and family needs.

Rashi's granddaughter Elvina is the subject of **Sylvie Weil's** *My Guardian Angel* (Arthur Levine Books, translated from the French by Gillian Rosner, \$16.95) Like Rashi's daughters, Elvina is also educated, and she also wishes for more than a life of housework and babies. Her story brings us into a different aspect of medieval French history: the Crusades. In this short novel, the town of Troyes, like so many of the Jewish communities of France and Germany, is swept up in fear of the impending Crusader army. When a young Christian boy flees the battle in the hopes of being allowed to study in a monastery, Elvina gives him food and shelter, a great risk that ultimately pays off. This book, written for younger audiences, introduces a spirited heroine and a chapter of Jewish history likely unfamiliar to most young teens.

— Rebecca Schwartz



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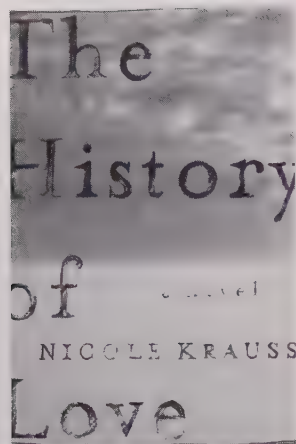
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Parsing Love



I can't remember the last time I encountered a book that I didn't want ever to have to put down. But as I was reading **Nicole Krauss's** brilliant and heart-stoppingly beautiful *The History of Love* (Norton, \$23.95), I literally held my breath as the resolution of this novel's two apparently separate narratives drew tantalizingly closer together.

Leo Gursky, a Holocaust survivor and retired locksmith, fears that his life-long invisibility means no one will notice when he dies; he wonders "who will be the last person to see me alive. If I had to bet, I'd bet on the delivery boy from the Chinese take-out...He stands in the door holding the greasy bag while I wonder if this is the night I'll finish off my spring roll, climb into bed, and have a heart attack in my sleep." Then there is Alma Singer, a 15-year-old who is trying to restore her mother to life after her father's death, and help her 10-year-old brother Bird navigate their Brooklyn reality. Named after a character in a book that her father gave her mother, Alma

studies natural science and worries about survival in the wilderness. Leo and Alma are both fully formed, believable characters, and however death-haunted they may be, they are also tenaciously, stubbornly, desperately trying to catch hold of life.

The book that Alma's father gave her mother is the novel within this novel, *The History of Love*, whose connection to Leo Gursky ultimately redeems both him and Alma. This fictitious novel, which is a philosophical riff on how various expressions of love came to be, was inspired by a girl whom Leo loved when he grew up in Poland. The book vanishes, only to reappear in South America when a published author, Zvi Litvinoff, sends it into circulation. Only one of the 2000 printed copies survives, discovered in a bookshop by Alma's father. Alma's quest to learn why a stranger has commissioned her mother to translate the book leads her to Leo, the book's other hero.

Krauss offers insights into the human experiences of living and loving that will haunt the reader long after the last page is turned: "Even now, all possible feelings do not yet exist.



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FOREWORD BY JOSEPH A. CALIFANO, JR.

Women under the Influence

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University

Women under the Influence

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University

foreword by Joseph A. Califano, Jr.

"This book reveals the unique characteristics of girls and women with drug and alcohol problems. It will greatly enhance the ability of doctors and counselors to help women of all ages and walks of life."

—Betty Ford

Pregnancy and Parenting after Thirty-Five

Mid Life, New Life

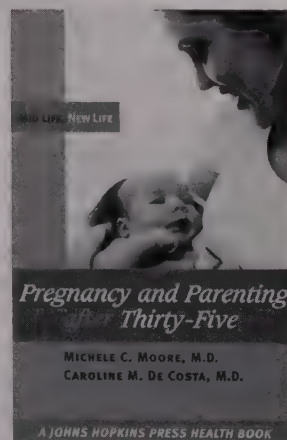
Michele C. Moore, M.D., and Caroline M. de Costa, M.D.

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There are still those that lie beyond our capacity and our imagination. From time to time, when a piece of music no one has ever written, or a painting no one has ever painted, or something else impossible to predict, fathom, or yet describe takes place, a new feeling enters the world. And then, for the millionth time in the history of feeling, the heart surges, and absorbs the impact."

—Merri Rosenberg

True Lives in Israel

Nobody knows better than a psychotherapist that every one of us has a story to tell. **Adaia Shumsky**, an Israeli psychotherapist and educator, now retired, has listened well to her clients and students. Building on their stories, she has created a memorable novel which casts light both on individual lives and on some of the large struggles roiling Israel: Orthodox vs. secular, progressives vs. traditionalists, attitudes toward lesbians, the painful pathologies in some Holocaust families, and—perhaps most

poignantly—the conflicting theories about how to raise an autistic child.

Without Shame (Xlibris Books, \$21.99) features Tamar and Orli, childhood friends living in Jerusalem in the early days of statehood. The two become lovers, separate, and then reunite—after Tamar's husband Eli, abandoning their marriage, discovers several shocking truths: his son Raz is autistic, his wife is a lesbian, and the boy he thought of as his child is the product of a one-time union of Tamar and a beloved gay childhood friend.

But, much like life itself, these stories are even more complicated. Overshadowing the narrative is the problematic relationship between Tamar and her parents, Fred and Stella, both of whom were born in Germany and fled the Nazis. Like many other survivors, Fred and Stella do not discuss their experiences. Once they learn that they are eligible for reparations, they are reluctant to accept them. Tamar eventually learns a truth that has been kept from her all her life: her grandmother was not born Jewish and she never converted; neither did Stella or Tamar.

In which our reviewer **holds her breath** til she finishes the book.

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Sensuality and Spirituality

Marcia Falk brings alive the voices of Jewish women—from the sensual lyrics of *The Song of Songs* to today's mystics and modernists.

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Two Russian grandmothers, brave in startlingly different ways.

Technically, therefore, they are not Jewish. Fred comes to think that he has sinned against God by not insisting upon their conversion, telling no one except finally Tamar that it is guilt that has caused his turning to Orthodox Judaism. And he sees Tamar's lesbianism as another "sin."

But this is a book more about mothers than fathers. Turning from Stella's coldness, Tamar is drawn to Orli's mother, the earthy and artistic Carmela. And finally, there is the mother Tamar eventually becomes to Raz. She understands his autism and learns to be a substitute mother and teacher to the children in the residential facility she eventually heads.

Like Tamar and Orli, Adaia Shumsky, who is also the author of *A Bridge Across the Jordan*, grew up in Jerusalem during the time Israel was becoming a state. In *Without Shame* she has created a fitting tribute to those whose stories she has transformed into fiction.

—Julia Wolf Mazow

That Fiendish Lottery

Guilt and loss pervade *Ester and Ruzya*, (Dial Press, \$24.00), a memoir of the lives of author **Marsha Gessen's** two Russian grandmothers, both "winners" in a fiendish lottery where extermination is the cost of losing. Through a remarkable combination of personal interviews and meticulous research, Gessen recreates the times and travails of the two women whose children one day meet, marry and become her parents.

Ester, born in Bialystok, where almost every Jew was ultimately doomed to Hitler's concentration camps, escaped to college in Moscow. Ruzya, Russian born, struggled under the constant anti-Semitism of Stalin's bloody purges and repressive regime. In telling their stories, Gessen, a journalist by profession, writes prose so unadorned and so evocative that the horrors she describes seem to be happening again as she recounts them. Always the events are made personal, and therefore more heartbreaking, as they work themselves out in the lives of these two brave women, who

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are determined to survive despite everything that conspires against them.

Ester is a beauty, feisty and rebellious, always ready to stand up to tyranny even when it threatens her very existence. Ruzya, a single mother, must get by with compromise as so many did under Stalin; she joins the Communist Party and becomes a high-level censor for the Soviet Government. "I was compelled to do it," she tells Gessen in 1999. "It was the period of that anti-cosmopolitan campaign, so this was, you understand, a forced measure of course, but at the same time it testified neither to the strength of my character nor to my courage nor to a desire to resist, you understand, it meant only that I acquiesced to the circumstances that life forced on me." She continues, rather wistfully, "Which is why I think I do not look good in your book. Unlike your other grandmother, who has a hero's biography."

Evaluating the complicated nature of heroism in extreme circumstances proves to be a difficult task. In a particularly chill-

ing moment, Gessen learns that Ester's father, Jakub, was a member of the Bialystok ghetto's Judenrat Presidium, Jewish officials appointed by the Nazis, ostensibly to keep order. Gessen acknowledges that "Hannah Arendt condemned the Judenrats as the most insidious of the forces that came together to kill the Jews." But Gessen ultimately sides with an historian of the Bialystok Ghetto who assures her in no uncertain terms that her great-grandfather was not a collaborator. As Gessen puts it, "I know [he] was a public official, a civic-minded man engaged in that most hopeless of pursuits, the inevitability and futility of which made me want to write this book: the search for a decent compromise."

"A decent compromise" seems the theme of this warm and loving book. Though she is ever candid, Gessen does not make the mistake of judging the choices her grandmothers were forced to make. Understandably, in a history of such unrelenting horror and deprivation, joy is not a

frequent presence. Nonetheless, joy is there in the tender stories of the two ill-fated love affairs suffered as girls by both grandmothers. Joy is there in the births of children, in the unexpected morsel of food during times of famine, in the stolen moments of a forbidden novel read by streetlamp through a bedroom window. Secret joy is there when Ester learns of the creation of the Jewish State or when she hears of Stalin's death. And joy is there in the embracing arms of family and friends, made all the more precious by the miracle of sheer survival.

—Faye Moskowitz

Correcting Men

In *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (University of California Press, \$39.95), **Shaye Cohen** offers an academic study of the historical debates around circumcision and the meaning of this ritual for the Jewish people. He offers

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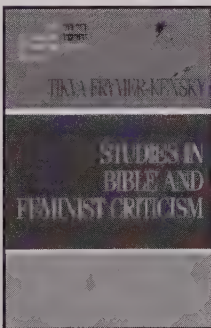
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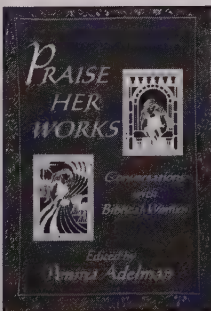
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a powerful argument for seeing the question of why women are not circumcised (it's not because a female lacks a penis) as a part of the historical polemics between Christians and Jews.

Cohen presents the question as follows: If circumcision is the ritual that brings Jews into Jewish community, analogous to the sacrament of baptism, what does it mean that Jewish women are not included? Does this mean that women are not Jews? For most rabbis, the issue was obvious. As Cohen explains, "the absence of circumcision bespeaks their secondary, anomalous, problematic place in the rabbinic hierarchy. They are Jews of course, but they are Jews who are not obligated to study the Torah or to observe all the commandments." Because this inequity was not a problem to the sages of antiquity, they felt no need to account for women's exclusion. It was only in the high Middle Ages (ca. 1100-1400), according to Cohen, that Jews began to address Christian critics; and it is these responses that lie at the heart of Cohen's study. He shows how

these later sources made explicit the implicit judgment of earlier Talmudic sources that the Jewishness of women is of a lesser kind than that of Jewish men.

According to some of these sources, Jewish women are just fine the way they are, while Jewish men must be corrected. In this vein, Maimonides argued that the purpose of circumcision is "to teach men to moderate their lust" so that they can devote themselves more fully to God. Another source maintained that circumcision is only one of the 613 commandments; and no individual Jew, male or female, observes, or is obligated to observe all 613, thus minimizing the commandment of circumcision altogether.

Cohen then brings readers into the modern period by addressing Reform Jewish debates about circumcision in the 19th century where, in the name of progress, reformers began to raise questions about circumcision not unlike those posed by Christian polemicists. As Cohen argues, these reformers seemed not to know that they were echoing amongst themselves the

polemics originally directed against Jews.

Although framed by contemporary feminist concerns, this is really not a book about the status of Jewish women or about the contemporary meaning of circumcision. Cohen does not engage with recent Jewish feminist scholarship that has challenged the profound inequities the rabbis took for granted, nor does he fully address recent communal efforts to forge new rituals of initiation or efforts to debate the ongoing merits of circumcision. And although this book ends up being very much about male Jewish bodies, Cohen makes virtually no mention of the wealth of recent critical scholarship on this subject, nor does he discuss seriously those Jewish feminist scholars who have addressed the issue of women and a phallic covenant.

Those interested in the communal implications of these discussions and creative and critical efforts to either redress gender inequities in Jewish life will be disappointed. The book never really addresses the question posed by its provocative title, so it fails to deliver on its promise. —Laura Levitt



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Gourmet Poems

In her most recent collection, *My Kafka Century* (Action, \$12.00), **Arielle Greenberg's** greatest poetic gift is her subtlety. She's so subtle that you may not realize what she's said until quite a while later, after you've had a chance to more fully digest her words. In fact, reading a Greenberg poem is not so different from eating gourmet cuisine; at first, her writing elicits a smile, and only later does one sense the depth of flavors and textures behind the first impression, with their satisfying and lingering aftertaste.

We see this quality best in the lines hidden within her poetic strata. Rather than saving her most clever turns of phrase to showcase at the end of her poems, Greenberg, confident in her own abilities, offers these wonderful little surprises deep inside the body of her poems. Her endings don't fall flat, exactly, but there's no big bang either. What

you get is a charming little love poem like "Diptych," written, appropriately, in unrhymed couplets. Smack in the middle is this: "I'm still flushed. Still. / We had a neverending." And on the poem goes. And then, six couplets later, it's over, and you think, "We had a neverending?" And so the line resounds.

Greenberg's other great talent here is voices, and she captures some of them with remarkable verisimilitude. The speaker of "Everything Natalie," whom I picture as a love-obsessed teenage boy, writes with the angst-ridden but snidely self-aware voice so common in precocious teens, and yet the poem contains a hint of troubling darkness, too. This one-and-a-half page poem makes you want to hear more from this kid—a novel, perhaps?—yet you feel that you know him remarkably well after so brief an encounter.

The poetic "I" is somewhat less successful when Greenberg moves closer to home, speaking in a voice that is more

ostensibly hers. In "Valentine," for instance, she includes some lovely turns of phrase, but the poem is not nearly as effective as those in which she adopts another persona entirely, such as "Katie Smith Says, 'A Woman's Body is a Battleground. I Should Know.'" This thoroughly creepy poem is written in the voice of the woman who, last year in Kentucky, made the national headlines when she attempted to cut a baby out of the womb of a stranger. The poem ends with the chilling line, "And do you believe in fairies? Clap your hands if you do."

Undoubtedly, one of the strongest works in the collection is *The Dybbuk*, a three-sectioned poem which includes a funny and thoughtful approach to gender roles. The best line comes at the end of the section entitled "Gilgul (Rolling)": "One day G-d and I will double-date, / and I will get to know His middle dash up close." It's the kind of line, in the kind of poem, that you want to taste again.

—Gillian Steinberg

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Women, Speak up!

Author **Leora Tanenbaum**

(Oprah, Today, The Forward, Hadassah, NPR...) is

writing a book about American women—

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"Earth Ambulance" by Helène Aylon at Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art in Peekskill, NY.

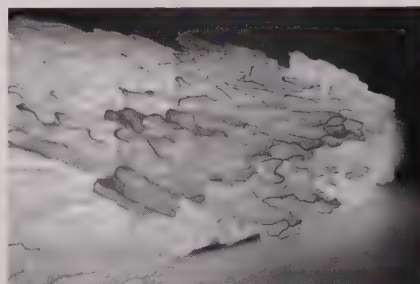
Bridge of Knots. Artist Helène Aylon has knotted together hundreds of women's pillowcases with their dreams written upon them. They appear in the exhibit "Visual Politics: The Art of Engagement," April 19-July 29 at the Katzen Center's Sculpture Garden at American University. Aylon says the work "connotes the concept of *hatzala*—rescue—and it is women who will rescue this earth." A portion of the Bridge of Knots also surrounds the "Earth Ambulance" as the permanent installation at the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art in Peekskill, NY. american.edu/cas/katzenharvestworks.org



Camp Airy, JMM, 1993.

Cabin Fever: Jewish Camping and Jewish Commitment, an exhibition for children and families, focuses on summer camps attended by Jewish Marylanders. Visitors to the replicated camp environment—complete with a campfire, bunk house, arts and crafts pavilion, waterfront, dining hall, and more—can create Jewish-themed arts and crafts projects, interact with Israeli

staff, and sing Hebrew songs and participate in *kabbalat shabbat* services. The exhibit is meant to give a taste of "the transformative power of camp." Curator Deborah Cardin explains, "Camp experiences are among the most positive Jewish experiences that young people can have." Through February 2007 at the Jewish Museum of Maryland, in Baltimore. Jewishmuseummd.org

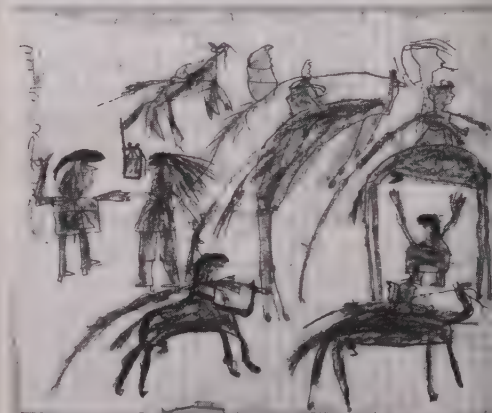


Trust table lamp, Ayala Serfaty, Israel, 2005, tinted glass, ceramic base.

Solos: New Design from Israel is the first museum exhibition of contemporary Israeli design in the U.S. It marks the 100th anniversary of Jerusalem's Bezalel Art School and presents projects by 19 Israel-based designers who are exploring the sculptural, material, functional and conceptual possibilities of "useful things." Included are works by Ayala Serfaty, Zivia and Nati Shamia-Opher. Through April 23 at the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum in New York. cooperhewitt.org

Inspired by Miriam. When the poet Enid Dame died in 2003, she was editing a collection on the prophetess Miriam. Building on Dame's essay, notes and poems, a special issue of the journal Bridges will be about this powerful and silenced woman. Editors are especially interested in work on Miriam that motivates *tikkun olam*, repair of the world, including portraits of historic and contemporary women activists, outcasts and healers. Submissions must be unpublished and original. Send duplicate copies and SASE for reply or submit via e-mail. Bridges, PO Box 1206, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. clare@bridgesjournal.org.

Awake at Night is a therapeutic rehabilitation program for adolescents engaged in prostitution run by the nonprofit organization Elem Youth in Distress in Israel. The program, in Tel Aviv, offers a supportive day center, a hot line, community outreach, medical care and close contact with mentors and professionals. Last year they provided services to 95 girls, boys and transgender Jewish and Arab youth, including a dozen that were able to break away from prostitution, according to Dorit Fridman, director, as reported by Brenda Gazzar on women's e-news. Elem Youth in Distress in Israel: elem.org/index_flash.html



Doa', Age 11 or 12. Janjaweed descend on a village on horses and camels, a woman flings her arms in the air as she is targeted for sexual violence or execution. A soldier takes a woman to be raped. She has a cell phone next to her head: "She wants to call the agencies for help."

Smallest Witnesses: The Crisis in Darfur Through Children's Eyes. On a recent mission to the refugee camps along Darfur's border with Chad, researchers Annie Sparrow and Olivier Bercault, of Human Rights Watch, gave children pens and crayons to draw while their families were being interviewed. Without any instruction or guidance, the children drew scenes from their experiences of the war in Darfur: attacks by the Janjaweed, bombings by Sudanese government forces, shootings, rapes, burning of their villages, and their flight to Chad. Images of animals and flowers depicting their ordinary village life were juxtaposed with horrible

images of violence. The children insisted the researchers take their drawings with them in the hope that the rest of the world could see their story. This exhibition shares 17 of their powerful pictures—and the effect of this atrocity on its youngest witnesses. The drawings will be on display through April 2, concurrent with another exhibition tackling youth perceptions of tragedy, “Anne Frank: A History for Today,” running through May 28.

spertus.edu

hrw.org/photos/2005/darfur/drawings

NAVAH (Non-Profit Association for Volunteering and Assisting the Hurt) will be hosting a Passover gathering for the families of victims of Palestinian terror, including close relatives of those killed at a seder in 2002 at the Park Hotel in Netanya. “Despite the best intentions of the broader society, nobody can truly appreciate what these families are going through as well as others who have been forced to endure similar tragedies,” says Tehila Friedman, founder/director of NAVAH which was created to allow for the development of a supportive community amongst the victims themselves.

navah.org.il



I Was a Teenage Feminist.

Why is it that young, independent, progressive women in today's society feel uncomfortable identifying as feminists? A documentary film about redefining the “F-word” directed by Therese Shechter asks: Has feminist become a dirty word? trixiefilms.com



Three Sisters, 1992, Vardi Kahana



Three Sisters, 2005, Vardi Kahana

Israeli photographers and artists go beyond “issues of contested politics and political identity” in “The Art of Living: Contemporary Photography and Video from the Israel Museum.” Selected artists include: Idit Greenberg, Michal Heimann, Noel Jabbour, Vardi Kahana, Hanna Saar, Naomi Salmon, Tal Shochat, and Noa Zayit. April 4–July 30 at the Contemporary Jewish Museum of San Francisco. jmsf.org

Manos Bendichas (Ladino for “blessed hands”) is a Jewish women's art group in Bulgaria that recreates traditional crafts typical of Sephardi Jews of the Balkans. It was established in 1996 by Lidia Yulzary, a knitting designer, Juliana Farhi, an embroidery designer and art therapist and Madlena Bally an economist and manager of the group. The project is the primary means of support for 85 Jewish women in Bulgaria. You can order their kippot, challah covers for Shabbat and Rosh Hashana, matzoh pockets for Pesach, Tu b'shvat bags and women's “ritual shawls” and place special orders. Manos_Bendichas@shalom.org

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Letters to Sala: A Young Woman's Life in Nazi Labor Camps. At age 16, Sala Garnicar entered the Nazi labor camp system, where she was imprisoned from 1940 to 1945. She was able, amazingly, to save 300 letters sent to her by friends and family from outside and within the camps. The letters document the harsh consequences of the Nazi slave labor system and reflect Sala's relationship with people such as Ala Gartner, one of four women hanged in Auschwitz after participating in an armed rebellion. The letters are documentation of Nazi atrocities written by the victims of those events during the time they were unfolding. They were recently donated by Sala's daughter, Ann Kirschner, to the New York Public Library's Dorot Jewish Division and are on display through June 17, 2006. nypl.org/research/calendar/exhib/hssl/hsslexhibdesc.cfm?id=410

Eta Wrobel fought against the Nazis as a Jewish partisan in Poland. She is featured on a Jewish resistance fighter sticker. Learn more about her and other heroic Jewish fighters during World War II at jewishpartisans.org.

—compiled by Naomi Danis



What's in Your Wallet?

That Ominous Organ-Donation Card

by Melanie Weiss

Sitting at my parents' kitchen table right after I got back from a year of study in England, my mother handed me a health care proxy form to fill out. (She's a social worker, in the middle of a state-wide campaign to raise awareness about instructing others how you want to be treated should you be incapacitated.) Page two required me to sign on the dotted line to donate my organs, and I stopped

short. Although I've called myself a Conservative Jew my whole life, it's only been a year that I've started to pay closer attention to how Jewish law views what I classify as "The Important Stuff." Matters pertaining to the end of life—especially when the life in question is mine—certainly qualify as "important." "Hey. What's the official halakhic deal with organ donation?" I asked, only to be reminded that, especially with a year in a British Jewish Studies department under my belt, *I* was the resident expert on issues of halakha. If I didn't know, it was up to me to find out.

I started my search for halakhic organ donation information the way I start my search for a good feminist bookstore: I googled. And I discovered that there are serious reasons—for a Jew and for a woman—to consider becoming an organ donor.

Don't we have to get over our ghoulish anxieties about our own mortality? Aren't Jewish women obligated to consider being donors both because of moral imperative and because of Jewish law about saving a life? The Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Women of Reform Judaism have co-sponsored a pamphlet, available online and in Reform congregations, called "Matan Chaim: The Gift of Life," urging organ donation. The pamphlet speaks of the Jewish obligations to saving a life at almost any cost. "Matan Chaim" doesn't, however, speak to the real nuts and bolts of halakha. Neither does the "National Sabbath Kit" provided by Transplant Awareness, Inc., a national nonprofit organization [www.transplantawareness.org], although the kit does address Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Jews.

The first result to pop up on Google was HODS, the Halachic Organ Donors Society, which both spreads the good word and makes actual connections between potential donors and recipients. There are important reasons (for Jews, for women) to arrange to donate our organs after we die, yet the misconceptions about issues of organ donations are both widespread and, oddly, entrenched. (One rabbi has described the idea of a so-called Jewish prohibition on donation as "the most successful *bubbemeise* propaganda campaign of all time.") These misconceptions turn out to account for a large part of Jews' resistance to Jewish organ donation; on top of this, we—just like other people—resist facing the thought of our own mortality.

The HODS website (www.hods.org) goes into specific areas of Jewish law that might have stopped religiously observant Jews from considering organ donation, including *nivul hamet* (the prohibition against needless mutilation of a cadaver) and *halanat hamet* (the prohibition against delaying a burial) and weighs them against *pikuach nefesh* (the commandment to save lives). Orthodox rabbis and those of other denominations find that the commandment to save a life outweighs other laws—or doesn't even come into conflict with them in the first place.

Womanshealth.gov, run by a subsidiary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, notes that the number of people waiting to receive organ transplants rises each year, even though, according to the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN), there has been an increase in organ donation from 4,080 in 1988 to nearly 25 times that today. The number of people who die every year in the U.S. while waiting for a healthy liver, lung, heart or kidney reaches well over 5,000—a number especially horrifying given that these desperately ill people know exactly what could save them; there is no mystery diagnosis in these cases, just a clearcut need, but insufficient resources to meet that need.

Continued on page 33

Why it matters—as a Jew, as a woman—that your body parts live on after you.



Bring in the Show

Celebrating nearly 30 years of charting Jewish women's lives with exuberance, rigor, clairvoyance, subversion, and tenderness, Lilith has created a stunning exhibition featuring some of the freshest ideas and the perennial writers and authors this magazine has published.

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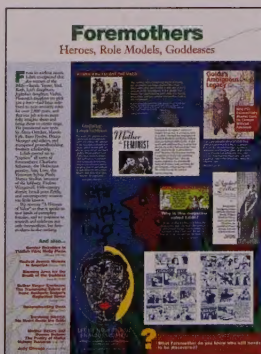
In 10 lively and revealing wall panels, the exhibition explores women's dramatic new roles in Jewish ritual and as rabbis and cantors, the changing face of Jewish organizations, intimate relationships, new feminist scholarship, and more. The exhibition is complete with gorgeous illustrations and covers from the magazine.

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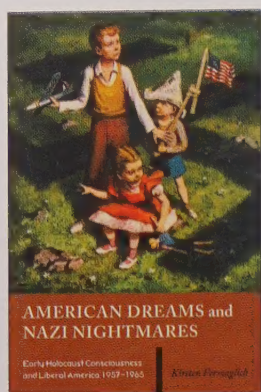
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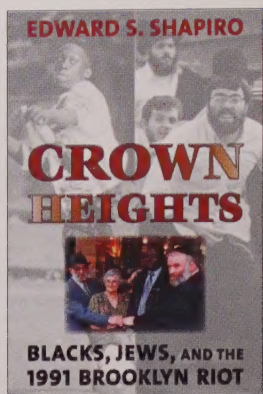
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